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THE  
GOSPEL TO THE POOR  
*VERSUS*  
PEW RENTS.

BY  
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WITH  
INTRODUCTION BY BISHOP CARMAN,  
AND PAPERS  
ON THE PEW SYSTEM, BY REV. NEWMAN HALL, LL.B., AND OTHERS.

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TORONTO:  
WILLIAM BRIGGS,  
78 & 80 KING STREET EAST.  
MONTREAL: C. W. COATES. HALIFAX: S. F. HUESTIS  
1884.

AUSTIN,

ENTERED, according to the Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four, by WILLIAM BRIGGS, in the Office of the Minister of Agriculture.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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BY BISHOP CARMAN.

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PRINCIPAL AUSTIN, with his usual vigor and directness, evidently under pressure both of little time and earnest conviction, writes hastily and heartily some things for the directors of Christian enterprise and Church support, particularly on this continent, to think about calmly and prayerfully. In lands where worship is pomp and parade; where procession is the substitute for preaching, and gorgeous ceremonial for instruction, meditation and prayer; where priests are maintained out of the public revenues, and grotesque beadle's ply the collection-boxes without intermission among the crowds in the free and equal standing places gazing at the pageant of orchestra and altar, the pew-rental question is scarcely likely to arise. But where the people assemble to be instructed in the doctrines of our holy religion, to meditate thereupon, and abide as in the Divine presence, the combined necessity of sitting accommodation and

pastoral support would readily enough suggest such a device. Primitive, humble, earnest Christianity might dictate something better, something more brotherly, more like the family of God, more clearly adapted to the genius of the Gospel,—its prevalence among all classes and its spread in all lands. It would certainly appear to be a stroke of *worldly* wisdom, more of the policy of the children of this world than of the children of light, to pay the preacher by taxing the pews. At all events, as this brochure amply demonstrates, great evils have grown up in connection with the pew-rental system. The reprehensible distinction between the rich and poor in the house of God; the fostering of social and family pride and exclusiveness; the unseemly competitions, strifes, and even divisions, in the household of faith; and often the invasion and conquest of the sanctuary, and even the control of the pulpit, by mammon and power, directly or indirectly through this usage, in many churches, proclaim at once and decisively that if this plan of operations should not be abolished, put under a prohibitory pew-rental law, it should be promptly put and persistently kept under some very wise and vigorous regulations. Brother Austin evidently believes the whole thing is wrong in principle as well as destructive in practice; which latter must,

of course, always follow the former. But there are some, possibly, that do not quite hold with our brother, that the whole business is wrong in principle, but a justifiable means under prudent direction, in settled communities for the support of the pastorate. It is to be hoped and expected that a discussion of the subject will bring all to a better understanding of the interests involved, and at least immediately abate the evils that have grown upon the system; if indeed they are not, as our writer maintains they are, inseparable from it. Common observation will at least justify the remark, that in settled religious communities, with moderate demands all around and economical management, these evils are reduced to a minimum.

Perhaps it might not be amiss to inquire whether this system under consideration, while it is a fungus in which some poison develops, is not rather an effect than a cause. A cancer it may be; but does it not spring out of deeper evils in the whole body, which cured, the cancer would lose its virus, and actually wither for lack of material to feed upon? The simplicity of the gospel in its militant and aggressive state ill comports with expensive buildings, sumptuous appointments, and large emoluments. When we give ourselves to costly churches and high salaries, we give ourselves to a call upon the public revenues of the

country or large ecclesiastical preserves and investments, or some efficient scheme of money-raising that must lay hold upon the men who have the money. And the men that have the money are by no means always the followers of the lowly Nazarene, or choose His spirit of action or plan of operation. By undue expensiveness in our church appointments and arrangements we do the very thing John Wesley told us not to do ; that is, we make rich men necessary to us. In that case they will, of course, bring on pew-renting, or whatever policy suits them, to raise money. If it comport with spiritual power and true Church work, all well ; but if not—why, the money must be had anyway !

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# THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR

*VERSUS*

## PEW RENTS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### GOD'S KINDNESS TO THE POOR, A LAW TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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"He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." (Psalm lxxii. 4.)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." (Luke iv. 18.)

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LIKE a golden thread through the web of both the Old and the New Testament history runs the record of God's special kindness to the poor. By a great many particular provisions in the Mosaic economy, by promise and by prophecy of the olden time, God revealed the tenderness of His compassion toward the poor of our race. Numerous and convincing as were these divine manifestations of peculiar interest and

tenderness toward the poor in the Old Testament times, they are but primal rays of the meridian glory of God's love that burst upon the humbler classes after the Sun of Righteousness had risen upon the world. The life and the lips of the divine Teacher were equally eloquent in unfolding the riches of God's grace to the poor.

A few illustrations of God's kindness toward the poor, taken in order from the Old Testament and the New, will help to impress this great lesson upon the Christian heart and to develop the great central principles followed out in God's dealings with those who are in poverty or misfortune. In the Mosaic economy we discover *a very decided adaptation of the claims of religion to the circumstances of the poor*. The poor man, for example, was not required to make so expensive a trespass offering unto the Lord as the rich. If he were not able to bring a lamb, two turtle doves or two young pigeons were acceptable in place thereof (Lev. v. 7), and lest even the sacrifice of the doves and pigeons might prove burdensome—the law thus adapting itself to the extremest poverty—it was enacted that the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour should be acceptable in lieu thereof, if the worshipper could not afford a costlier sacrifice! Could any evidence be more positive, could any proof of God's tenderest compassion to the poor be more convincing, than this merciful provision in their behalf on the part of the Lawgiver? There is not a shadow of reason for supposing that the tenth part of an ephah of flour

from the poor man was not as acceptable as the lamb or the kid of the goats from the rich. Nor did the poor suffer the slightest inconvenience or disadvantage in the public worship on account of the smallness of his offering.

The same adaptation of the law of sacrifices runs throughout the whole Jewish code. Thus, for example, the leper ordinarily was required to give three lambs, three-tenth deals of fine flour, and a log of oil for his cleansing, but, in the case of the poor leper, the requirement was narrowed down to one lamb, one-tenth deal of flour and a log of oil. (Lev. xiv. 21.) The same considerate kindness is manifested to the poor in the laws respecting harvest fields and vineyards. "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger; I am the Lord your God." (Lev. xix. 9, 10.) This divine law checked miserly avarice, encouraged the exercise of brotherly sympathy toward the poor, and assured them of the thoughtful solicitude of the great Lawgiver in their behalf.

Akin to this enactment was the law requiring the rest of the land every seventh year, which was framed especially in the interests of the poor. "And six years shalt thou sow thy land and shalt gather in the fruits thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still, that the poor of thy people may eat. In like

manner shalt thou deal with thy vineyard and with thy oliveyard." The poor were, by divine enactment, to be freely invited to the sacrificial feasts. The law of release every seven years was graciously designed to mitigate the evils of poverty, while charity toward poor brethren was made a fundamental law of the Jewish religion. (Read Deut. xv. 7-11.) Such being the merciful provisions of the great Ruler in the Mosaic religion, which was confessedly very imperfect and exclusive in its character, and such the equality of all worshippers, rich and poor, under Judaism, we would naturally expect in Gospel times a continuance of the same compassionate policy toward the poor and needy, and a more complete enunciation of the doctrine of human equality than the world had yet received. Nor are we disappointed. Our Lord began His earthly career by an act of astounding condescension to the poor, whereby He gave to them the greatest possible proof of His sympathy and love. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Though rich in Himself—all the perfections of the Godhead belonging to Him, in His possessions—the universe created by Him and for Him, belonging to Him of divine right, in glory and in honour—the material and spiritual creation shining with His glory and proclaiming His praise, yet He became poor. Out of all the various grades of human condition from the lowest poverty to the highest affluence that were open

to Him, He chose that of humble, honest poverty, and thus gave to the poor of every age an abiding and convincing proof of His compassion and favor. Coming, as He did, on a mission of mercy to the race—most of whom had to struggle against poverty—He became poor that He might the more effectually preach the Gospel to the poor. Christ identified Himself with the poor throughout His entire ministry. Zaccheus, who climbed a tree in His eagerness to behold Christ, and who afterward gave substantial proof of the sincerity of his repentance and faith; Joseph of Arimathea, who withheld not his own tomb for Christ's burial; and many other rich friends of Jesus were passed by in the selection of His apostles for humble fishermen and despised tax-gatherers, that Christ might distinguish the poor with His special favor. Thus these apostles from their homes of poverty went forth as fitting standard-bearers of a religion specially adapted to the poor.

An equally convincing proof of Christ's special regard may be found in the wonderful adaptation of all His teaching to the comprehension and circumstances of the poor. His language was that of the common people. Such was the simplicity of His style, and such the subject-matter of His discourses, that the common people heard Him gladly. Nearly all His illustrations are chosen from the humbler walks of life, and are such, therefore, as would easily be intelligible to the mind and affecting to the heart of a poor man. Take, for example, the parable of the laborers. Who could

enter into the meaning and appreciate the teaching of that parable like the poor man who had toiled for a penny a day? Who could understand and feel the apparent injustice of giving to the eleventh-hour laborer the same reward as to the others, like the man who had borne the burden and heat of the day? The Vanderbilts, Astors and Goulds of that day, or of any age, could scarcely interpret the parable of the lost piece of silver, but men who have been pinched by poverty know full well the anxiety of the poor woman for her missing coin. The poor, and the poor alone, can appreciate the joy of the poor woman over the recovery of her silver. Further proof of the special adaptation of Christ's teaching to the poor might be found in every discourse He uttered. In all ages the poor have appreciated more fully and profited more largely by Christ's teachings than the rich. And so Christ's entire ministry had in it an adaptation throughout to the circumstances and needs of the poor, and hence Christianity has been characterized justly as "the religion of the poor." The Rev. H. S. Brown, a distinguished English minister, points out in one of his discourses the remarkable reply made to John's disciples, by which Christ emphasizes His preaching to the poor as the very climax of all the blessings and benefits of His ministry. John had been imprisoned for preaching against royal sins, and hearing of Christ, sends some of his followers to enquire: Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another? Christ said, Go and shew John again those things ye

do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, *and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.* As much as to say: Should John doubt My Messiahship after hearing of My miracles—even the raising of the dead—he will not doubt when he hears I am preaching to the poor. The Christian religion began its career among the poor, and has in every age been an unspeakable boon to them in alleviating their sorrows, removing their burdens and lifting them up into comfort and hope. The first financial engagements of the Church were not so much in the line of ministerial support, or church building, or even missionary work, as in the support of widows and the poor. The first Christian collections were for the poor saints.

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with its doctrines of human brotherhood and human equality, has smoothed away those artificial distinctions of birth and fortune that have proved such terrible instruments of oppression to the poor in past ages. Oppression of the weak, slavery in any form or degree, cannot abide the influence of a religion that points all mankind to a common divine parentage, putting master and slave, king and subject, rich and poor upon a common platform with a common prayer: Our Father which art in heaven. Look at the civil, social, intellectual and spiritual blessings conferred by the Gospel upon the poor, and you cannot fail to read the lesson of its peculiar adaptation to the humble and oppressed

among men. All our charitable associations, all our benevolent societies, our hospitals for the indigent sick, our asylums for the deaf, the dumb and the blind, which have proved such inestimable blessings to the race, are the outgrowth of the Christian spirit, and hence but the realization of God's thoughts of mercy toward the poor. Doubtless these intimations of special divine regard are to be taken not only as revelations of God's character, but also as indications of His will. The dealings of God with man as recorded in Scripture, are generally to be taken as examples for our imitation as well as admonitions for our instruction. Thus the Old Testament history has its perpetual lessons to our race. (1. Cor. x. 6.) The whole life of Christ is doubtless intended to be educational. (John xiii. 14, 15.) We are to be imitators of God. (Ephes. v. 1.) Hence the divine kindness to the poor, as revealed to us in Scripture, is as much a law to the Church of Christ to-day as though promulgated amidst the thunders of Sinai, or written in letters of fire across the heavens. Should any one ask, therefore, How should the Christian Church treat the Poor? The answer is ready: As God has taught us by example and precept.

To briefly summarize the practical lessons from these facts, let us note that in God's treatment of the poor there has ever been—1. Not only full recognition of their circumstances and needs, but also kind consideration for their rights and feelings. 2. An adaptation of the financial claims of religion to their poverty. 3. No superior advantages in public worship to the rich

on account of his riches, or disadvantage to the poor on account of his poverty. "The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all."

Who can doubt that the Church of Christ, following the divine example, is under imperative obligations to consider the circumstances, the needs and the claims of God's poor; to so frame the ordinances of God's house that no distinctions on the ground of wealth or poverty shall be created; to so govern the house of God that the poor man may have equal rights and suffer no disadvantage on account of his smaller offering or lower social circle; to extend to the poor that sympathetic and cordial welcome to the public worship that shall make them feel equally as much at home there as their rich neighbours?

How is the Christian Church meeting these obligations to the poor to-day? Can the principles heretofore laid down and the duties pointed out, be recognized and obeyed where pew-renting obtains?

We venture to affirm, after some consideration of the question, that there is not a single principle in God's treatment of the poor that is not squarely violated by the ordinary system of pew rents; that there is not a single Scripture to authorize it, or one bearing upon the Church's duty to the poor, that is not desecrated by this abominable system; that the inevitable consequences of pew-renting—even where conducted with the utmost moderation and kindness—is the fostering of distinctions among worshippers, the practical exclusion of a large class from the public worship, and

the transforming of a church society into a select, religious club.

What consideration of the poor is there in a system of church management that compels the poor man either to pay as much as the rich, or advertize his poverty by sitting in the gallery or on the footstool of his rich neighbor, or absent himself from the church altogether? Surely the wisdom and piety of nineteenth-century Christians ought to be equal to the task of devising some system of church management that would permit the poor man to attend church without being repeatedly reminded of his poverty, and compelled to acknowledge the same publicly.

What right has any trustee board or managing committee to put the rich into a portion of the church by themselves, and the poor in the gallery, thus recognizing and perpetuating mere worldly distinctions in the house of God? Pew-renting is utterly inconsistent with the record of God's dealings with the poor. It would not have been tolerated under Judaism—partial and imperfect as that system confessedly was—and is as much out of harmony with the genius of Christianity as thumb-screws are out of harmony with the worship of to-day.

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## CHAPTER II.

### PEW-RENTING AN UNAUTHORIZED INNOVATION IN THE CHURCH AND A DESECRATION OF THE HOUSE OF GOD.

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"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all those that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves." (Matt. xxi. 12.)

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THE merchants and money-brokers of Christ's time were guilty of desecrating the sacred temple of God by engaging in secular traffic therein. The sale of sheep and oxen, and the changing of money—perfectly legitimate in themselves in a proper place—were a profanation of that temple which was rendered doubly sacred by its solemn consecration and its exalted associations and services. That the conduct of the traffickers was exceedingly heinous and impious in the sight of God, we have every reason to suppose from the unusual indignation manifest in the words and actions of Christ. So fierce and scorching were the rays of His wrath, so impetuous was His conduct, that the entire body of traffickers was stricken dumb with fear, and, in the midst of overturned seats and tables, rushed in panic from the place. There is every probability that the brokers and merchants were not

alone in the transgression and in our Lord's condemnation. It is impossible to conceive that outsiders were in peaceable possession of the Court of the Gentiles, and that the brokers had their money offices duly organized without the connivance of the temple authorities. The traffic appears to have been extensive, well organized and uninterrupted until our Lord purged the temple of its abominations. Randolph says:—"The seats and folds were let out by the priests, and an exorbitant gain made as well by them as by the money-changers and brokers." Our Lord certainly rebuked the priests and rulers of the temple when He expelled the traffickers, for the latter carried on their impious business by the purchased authority of the former.

There can be little doubt that had the traffic been conducted for the benefit of the temple funds, it would still have been as severely condemned by Christ, for all traffic was illegal and sacrilegious in the temple of God. It was the profanation of the sacred place, it was the desecration of that which should have been holy that called down upon the offenders the scathing rebuke of Christ.

Pew-renting in the church to-day is as unauthorized as the renting of seats and folds by the priests in the time of our Lord. The principle of barter is the basis of each transaction, and barter is a desecration of any place consecrated to God's worship. Nor have the trustee boards or managing committees of our churches to-day a shadow more authority for the renting or sale

condemn outsiders the General offices duly the temple been exten- our Lord Randolph the priests, them as by certainly when He al on their ty of the affic been it would st, for all emble of place, it ave been scathing authorized ts in the the basis n of any have the churches g or sale

of pews than the priests of our Lord's time for their conduct which received unmeasured condemnation. The renting of pews and the payment for the same cannot be construed into an act of worship. It is a commercial transaction on each side and by no means a devotional one. It degrades the church at once to the level of the music hall or theatre, in which people enjoy various grades of privilege according to their ability, and from which the poor are shut out altogether except they enter as dead-heads.

The giving of money in church for a charitable purpose, or for the support of religion, is an act of worship, and is fully authorized by the spirit, teaching and practice of the New Testament Church. But who ever authorized a trustee board of a Christian church to put up its pews at public vendue? The church is God's house and cannot be managed as private property or the property of a corporation. It is built and consecrated to one purpose, viz., the fulfilment of Christ's command to preach the Gospel to every creature. A recent correspondent of the Chicago *Tribune* puts the case thus:—

"Such a place of worship being dedicated and consecrated to this service, is God's temple and sanctuary, the appointments and accommodations of which cannot rightfully be set apart, or conveyed, or held by the builders or reputed owners thereof specially for the use or occupancy of any one upon the payment or contribution of money, as is done under the practice of pew-renting. No body of Christians has any right to

barter away those necessary accommodations or accessories for money, nor has an individual any better right to accept such assignment—unless custom makes a wrong to be right—than has a robber to acquire and assign property obtained by robbery. In things spiritual, or in duties or efforts pertaining to interests beyond the grave, it is undoubtedly the will of God that there shall be equality and freedom; that the wise and unwise, the learned and unlearned, the weak and powerful, the rich and poor shall stand upon a common level with equal advantages which none may presume to usurp nor curtail, nor ought any to surrender."

It may be said the authority for pew rents is in the necessity of the case. The Church must have funds, and this is the only efficient way of securing them. To which it is sufficient to reply that pew rents cannot claim to be the only efficient method of raising funds for the support of religion, since only one church fund out of many is generally raised by pew rents, and in many large and prosperous churches pew rents do not obtain at all. The simple fact that pew rents yield large financial returns can never sanction or authorize a system which violates the great cardinal doctrines of religion. If pew rents yield large returns financially, as some claim, the very same may be said of a great many unscriptural and irreligious systems of money-getting that churches have been tempted to adopt.

Where, we repeat, is the authority for renting pews in a church dedicated to God and consecrated to Christian worship? It is a pure assumption of authority

on the part of trustees for which not a shred of scriptural support can be produced—an assumption that partakes of a bold and sacrilegious character. For how can a board of trustees claim the right to rent or sell a pew to the highest bidder, or to fix a price upon admission thereto, without claiming the corresponding right of rejecting those who either cannot or will not meet the conditions imposed? The right to open the pew to a certain class implies of necessity the right to close it to all others. And what does the closing of the pew door mean? It means, to express it in the mildest form possible, that certain classes shall not hear the Gospel except under very humiliating circumstances, if at all. It does not meet our argument to reply that all except a certain few must be in any case rejected from each pew. It is true that only a limited number under the voluntary system can hear the Gospel from each pew. Yet there is a world of difference between a natural limitation of this sort that is "no respecter of persons" and an arbitrary rejection of all who are unable to pay pew rents, which has in itself a discrimination against the poor. It is true that if a church has a capacity of only five hundred, five hundred only can hear the Gospel there; but a trustee board would be none the less guilty on that account if it made a selection of the favored five hundred. Especially would the iniquity of such a selection be apparent to all, if the selection were based upon a mere worldly distinction, and virtually prohibited that very class that God has especially distinguished with His loving favor.

But there is something even more impious and sacrilegious in pew-renting than this discrimination against certain classes. Pew-renting or selling (for both are practised to-day) is a virtual putting up of the Gospel at public rental or sale. For what is it that gives value to the pews rented or sold? Certainly not the seats themselves. Can any one deny that it is chiefly the preaching of the Word of Life? Just as at the opera hall the performance of the musicians, or as in the theatre the acting of the "star," draws the crowd and gives value to the seats, so it is chiefly the preaching that gives value to the pews. Doubtless other considerations are taken into account both by church authorities and by church attendants, such as the beauty and comfort of the church, the class of people that attend, the quality of the vocal and instrumental music, and other kindred attractions. Still no one will deny that the preaching is the "star" attraction that "draws" and "pays" under the pew rent system. The value of the pews commercially depends upon the preacher's ability to preach the Gospel in an *attractive* and *pleasing* way to the people, and hence pews are at premium, par, or discount, according to this *peculiar* qualification of the Gospel minister employed. Hence churches that have involved themselves heavily in debt for a magnificent edifice, fine organ and the usual accompaniments, generally find themselves under necessity to call a "star" preacher to fill their pews and give them increased value.

What is this but making merchandise of the Gospel? There is as much a sale of the Gospel in the Church under pew-renting as there is of music and amusement in the opera and theatre. And what a perversion of the right ways of the Lord is here? That Gospel, one special glory of which is that, like its divine Author, it is no respecter of persons, under which there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all; that Gospel, unto which by glowing prophecy as well as by the lips of Christ all men were invited without money and without price, is now put up at public auction in our churches, or assessed by church officials at a higher or lower figure according to the state of the Gospel market! Can any one, for a moment, imagine Christ as the pastor of one of these pew-rented churches preaching to a select class of the people, while the poor and the "great unwashed" were ignored, or entirely shut out from His teaching? Can any one doubt that He, who declared Himself anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor, and who purified the temple of its abominations, would speedily sweep away every hindrance that prevents the poor man enjoying as much Gospel privilege and blessing as the rich? Would He, who first fully unfolded the great doctrines of divine fatherhood and human brotherhood, sanction a system that divides up those who have enough grace and wealth to attend church as railroad companies divide up the travelling public into first, second and third class, according to ability to pay?

Would He, whose burning words of indignation sent the impious traffickers and conniving priests of His own time terror-stricken from the temple, condone the conduct of church officials and ministers in making merchandise of Gospel truth?

In some cases under the pew system each seat is held at a certain price fixed according to its location. In other cases the pews are sold at public auction and the church is, for a time, converted into an auction hall, and the spirit of the mart is brought into the house of God.

Can any one conceive a scene more indecorous in the Christian Church than an auction of pews in which to hear the Word of God?

Let the reader picture to himself a crowd of excited buyers in a church spurred into unseemly rivalry by the tactics of an auctioneer, and vieing with each other in unholy rivalry to obtain "uppermost seats" in the sanctuary. Can conduct more reprehensible be imagined than that of church officials who instigate or sanction such shocking desecration of God's sanctuary? Surely if a deliberate attempt were made to offer insult to the Deity and to travesty the religion of the Cross, conduct better suited to the purpose could not well be chosen. Can it be that ministers and members of the Christian Church have forgotten that it was organized to preach the Gospel to all men, to teach men to be humble and Christ-like, to prefer one another, and to walk in Christ's footsteps in a ministry of love to the poor?

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE PEW RENT SYSTEM RENDERS THE CHURCH UNCATHOLIC AND EXCLUSIVE.

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"Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."—*Isaiah*.

"Compel them to come in."—CHRIST.

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IT is the characteristic of Christianity, as distinguished from Judaism and other systems of religion, that it knows no distinctions among men, offering its blessings alike to Jew and Gentile, bond and free, rich and poor. Whatever excuse there might have been for pew rents under Judaism, which was confessedly partial and exclusive in its character, there remains not a shadow of excuse for such an exclusive policy in managing churches under the Gospel, the fulness of whose provisions and the unlimited nature of whose blessings were the subject of glowing promise and prophecy through preceding ages.

That the Gospel is adapted to all men, that its provisions embrace all men, that it is to be preached to all men, and that the one great duty of the Christian Church is to press its claims as speedily as possible upon "every creature," are facts perfectly indisputable,

and facts, too, that must be taken into strict account in all the rules and regulations of the Church of God. The Church is, therefore, under imperative obligations to make her methods and her work fully harmonize with the great plan and scope of the Gospel. She dare not make arbitrary distinctions among men. She must be catholic in spirit, in her policy and in her polity. Now, pew rents of necessity render the Church uncatholic, because, in the first place, they shut out a large class that cannot pay the prices fixed upon the seats. Whether we like to admit it or not, whether we recognize or ignore it, there are in our towns and cities (where pew rents mostly obtain) thousands who cannot, if they would, pay the pew rents of our churches. To deny this is to deny a fact as patent to every careful observer as the fact of day and night. If the pastors and people of pew-rented churches are not acquainted with this fact, then so much the worse for that system that builds up a wall of separation between the genteel and respectable church attendants and the great mass of burdened and neglected poor. City missionaries know and attest the existence of a poverty among the masses undreamt of by those who only see men in churches or on the streets. The "first-class" city church knows, we fear, far too little about where the people live and how they live, and hence its pastor and officers can scarcely be expected to know that hundreds are practically unchurched by so simple a thing as a \$10 or \$20 annual pew rent. Men can only learn of this poverty by visiting the poor in

their homes (as Christ did), commingling with them socially, from both of which duties the city pastor is held absolved by the pressure of more important (?) public duties. But ignorance of the facts does not destroy them, and no one competent to judge will deny the truth of the statement, that a vast number of people are compelled to stay away from church because they cannot pay the trifling (?) pew rent. It does not invalidate or weaken our argument to say that many of the poor would not attend church if they could, so long as it is true that they cannot if they would.

But, again, the pew rent system renders the Church uncatholic in practically excluding a very large class who are not able to rent the best pews, and who have not grace enough to publicly acknowledge their poverty to the Church and the world. Among this class may be found a large number of people who "once saw better days," and moved in what is called the "highest circle" of society. Those people, whose social instincts are rooted in a certain plane of society, find it extremely humiliating to drop down from their former position into a poorer rank, into a less costly style of dress, and into a cheaper pew. The Rev. W. S. Rainsford, of St. George's Episcopal Church, New York, recently said: "Money is God's gift, but it should not be the simple test of the right to worship in God's house. I have seen a poor man enter into God's house for worship, and a policeman in uniform go to him to warn him that he was out of place. I knew

a woman, formerly a wealthy member of a church, who lost her property, took cheaper and cheaper pews, until she could no longer afford to rent one, who appealed to her pastor and was told by him with tears that she could no longer attend the services, because there were no free pews—that the pew system prevailed in that church." It matters little to the argument to point out the obvious fact that such people should smother their pride, and esteem the services of God's house of such inestimable value as to amply repay them for any self-crucifixion they may endure in attendance thereon. Such people, undoubtedly, if possessed of sufficient divine grace, will still attend church, and if not, will stay away; but in either case the pew rent system is responsible for heaping obstacles in the way of their hearing Christ's Gospel. Nor does it affect our contention at all to say that many of the poor, if they were prudent and self-denying, might readily save the price of their pew rents from self-indulgences, such as rum and tobacco. It is an undoubted fact that many who do not, might go to church if they would, as it is an undoubted fact that many who are too poor to pay pew rents might hear the Gospel from the gallery of the church or in mission chapels. The poor are not all saints, and if they were, the less necessity for the command, "compel them to come in." The Church must deal with men as they are, not as they ought to be. She must regard the facts in every case, not theories. She is bound to consider the circumstances, the vices

and indulgences, the prejudices and the pride of the various classes of society, and, so far as may be without the sacrifice of principle, she is to become all things to all men, that she may gain all. Even that which is perfectly harmless in itself should, under the impulse of divine love, be sacrificed if it make a brother offend. If pew rents were entirely reasonable, just and scriptural, in place of the reverse, the church ought to abolish them rather than place a stumbling-block in the way of so many people in attending divine worship.

While human nature is what it is, multitudes of people who feel themselves unable to pay pew rents will prefer, from mistaken notions of what is becoming and right, to sit at home and read the newspaper rather than voluntarily subject themselves to ejection from a rich neighbor's pew, or class themselves with the paupers of the church. The Rev. W. S. Rainsford, in a recent address in Toronto, said very truly : "People do not like to come into a pew church without some particular corner they can call their own, and to which they can bring their children." John Brown, the laborer, feels himself just as good a man as Jonathan Smiles, the liquor dealer, and when the Church gives Smiles an "uppermost" cushioned seat in the sanctuary, and offers him a plain bench in the gallery, he may or may not condemn the unscriptural distinction made, but he will very likely stay at home under the impression that the church is for the "monied men."\*

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\* Can any one wonder at this prevalent opinion of poor people when such facts as the following find their way into the public

That this impression is common among the poorer classes there can be no doubt, though it may readily be admitted that pew rents are not the only cause. The style of dress common in church, the natural timidity of poor people, and, above all, the great tendency everywhere apparent in human society to form into circles and coteries, as well as the pew system, are responsible for this widespread and exceedingly hurtful impression on the minds of the poor. On this very account the Christian Church should exercise double caution, lest by any unfortunate method or enactment she render the heavy burdens of the poor heavier. A religious paper of recent date says:—

“Christian people need to exercise a deal of wisdom lest the people who are in poverty, and who from that cause need to have the Gospel and its consolation specially brought to them, will be estranged from the Church and its ministrations. People of wealth naturally associate, as do literary people, and on the same principle the poor naturally blend their interests, and because people of wealth and education attend church and form their own social sets, the poor feel practically that they are invited to hold themselves aloof. There is no more Christ-like work than for people whom the Lord has blessed with the comforts of life and the advantages of intellectual training, to make those

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prints:—“A pew in Dr. Hall’s Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church was recently sold at public auction for \$1950. The first bid was \$1000. There were half-a-dozen bidders, *and the contest between them was spirited?*”

whom misfortune has visited with any humiliating circumstances feel the truth of the text that to the poor the Gospel is preached."

Some of those who are repelled by our unscriptural pew system are poor in this world's goods, but "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of heaven," and when church officials adopt a system of seating the people that puts the rich rogue, drunkard or debauchee into a cushioned seat in front, and gives the poor saint, because he is like Christ in his poverty, a bench in the corner, will not Christ say in the judgment, "Ye did it unto me?"

Pew rents repel many a sincere seeker after truth. "Let us suppose," says a correspondent of the Chicago *Tribune*, "that a man who has been a nonattendant at church becomes, in the providence of God, awakened to a sense of his lost condition, and his constant inquiry is, What shall I do to be saved? He gropes in anguish, he reads the Bible, he tries to pray, but finds no permanent relief. He is impelled to seek instruction concerning salvation in the Church. Where else should he go? He summons courage to enter the house of God. Being early, he stands at the entry ten or fifteen minutes, while the self-satisfied and the gay among the pew-renters rush past him. At the proper signal he and other discouraged non-pew-renters are distributed among the vacancies. He is seated in the pew of a late comer whom it would be indiscreet to incommodate, and he is bowed out and seated in another pew. Here, by the contemptuous glances of the occu-

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pants, he is given to understand that he is an intruder. Now, here is a man who is regarded from heaven by angels and archangels with bated breath, waiting to announce that another soul is saved through the blood of Christ and the ministration of His Church, but who, through the perverting effects of the practice of pew-renting, is being outraged in his application for religious instruction, and whose soul is thus being really jeopardized by professing Christians. But let us suppose that this man perseveres, nevertheless, and, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, is anxious that his wife and children shall accompany him, and he takes them on the next Lord's day to church with him. Then his feelings would be outraged indeed. This, too, is the discouraging treatment accorded to members of the Church and other professing Christians who are unable to rent pews. But aside from this man whose case I have cited, there are among us thousands of working girls and working boys, not to mention heads of families and their children, who, instead of being drawn or influenced toward the Churches that they may become awakened, are embittered by the repulses they are subjected to, which repulses, as I have shown above, are inseparable from the practice of pew-renting. Let it be remembered that these persons who are thus repulsed are those for whom Christ died, and over whom God in His compassion is yearning, and for whom the Holy Spirit is making intercessions with groanings that cannot be uttered. Then will not the wrath of God be kindled toward His professed people

if they persist in a practice which shuts these persons out from the feast which has been provided for them at such great cost?"

But, again, the system we are condemning is chargeable with rendering the Church exclusive in placing needless difficulties in the way of the attendance of strangers and travellers at church. This latter class, from the increasing railway facilities and our growing population, is destined to continually increase. Strangers are made to feel ill at ease in a church where pews are rented, on account of the very natural desire pew-tenants have for peaceable possession of their lawful property. A stranger is shown into a vacant seat by the usher who vainly hopes that Mr. B., the owner, will not be at church to-day, and finds that he is no sooner seated than his right to possession is disputed by the presence of the owner, whose eloquent looks and manner say, "My pew, if you please," or, "What right have you here?" or, "Don't you see I'm waiting?" He in confusion rushes into the nearest vacant pew, conscious by this time that every eye in the church is upon him, and behold his mortification to find that here also he is an intruder!

A stranger, it is said, recently visited a popular church in New York, and after being ejected in succession from two pews, walked out and asked the sexton at the door, "Whose church is this, sir?" "This is Christ's Church," responded the sexton. "Is He at home?" asked the man, as he walked away.

Is it any wonder if men who spend a large portion

of life in travel come to ignore the public worship of God, conducted under such an exclusive policy?

If proof of the existence of a large class of persons unreachéd and unevangelized by the ordinary church services were needed, the marvellous success of the Salvation Army movement furnishes it in abundance. Starting without wealth or culture, it commenced carrying the Gospel to the poor and neglected in their homes, and in a few years' time it has extended over Christendom, won its trophies for Christ in nearly every country of Europe and America, and is now making a successful attack upon the dark masses of heathendom. This movement is becoming to Methodism what Methodism was a hundred years ago to the Establishment—a quickener of spiritual life. It is not necessary to commend every feature of the movement, nor to approve everything in connection with its public services, in order to render unqualified praise to its zeal and devotion, and to that Christ-like spirit that prompts its adherents to seek out of the highways those who sadly need but are unable to pay for the Gospel of Christ.

It is easy to criticise and condemn—and certainly the Salvation Army movement is open to many criticisms—yet if any have the right to criticise and condemn this movement, they are not those who have by an unscriptural and iniquitous method of church management built up a mighty barrier between the poor and the Gospel.

The simple facts seem to be that large numbers of

the poor cannot pay pew rents if they would, and others would not if they could. The former class, must stay at home, or humiliate itself publicly, which is hardly to be expected of unsanctified human nature. The latter class will never take kindly to a system that gives the rich man every advantage merely on account of his wealth. If every man were sufficiently enlightened and religious, there would be less objection, perhaps, to a fixed assessment on seats, but there would also be less necessity for the Church and for preaching under any conditions. As it is, pew rents are a bar and hindrance to all evangelizing of the masses, and entirely out of harmony with the catholic spirit of Christianity.

Let the candid reader judge how far the policy of churches in the matter of pew rents is in accord with that zeal and earnestness that should ever characterize Christian people in evangelizing the masses, in "compelling" all men to come into the Church and into the kingdom of God.



## CHAPTER IV.

PEW RENTS CREATE UNWISE AND UNSCRIPTURAL  
DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN RICH AND POOR  
IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

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"The rich and poor meet together."—*Solomon.*

"Bear ye one another's burdens."—*Paul.*

"For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect for him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves?"—*James.*

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**I**F no other charge could be urged against pew renting than that it gave the rich man in church certain advantages and privileges solely on account of his wealth, and put the poor man under serious disadvantages solely on account of his poverty, surely this should prove its utter condemnation. And who can deny that this discrimination exists in favor of the rich, or that it is made solely on the ground of wealth? What other qualification than the possession of money is required for securing the best seats in our churches? And what other reason than his poverty is there for making the poor man a vagrant in church or putting him under the rich man's footstool? Distinctions exist

in human society, and seem, indeed, necessary to it, but they are entirely out of place in the Church of God. Here all distinctions should be laid aside, for they avail nothing in divine worship. A man is none the better for his wealth nor the worse for his poverty in the sight of God, who is no respecter of persons. Under Judaism repeated cautions and commandments were given against respect of persons in judgment: the poor man was not to be ignored nor the rich favored. Solomon assures us that to have respect of persons is not good. Jude condemns those who have men's persons in admiration because of advantage. James assures us that if we have respect of persons we commit sin and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

The pew system, if it has not respect to persons, has very great respect to purses, for it places the disposal of the very best seats at church in the hands of those who have the most money.\* Thus men who manage the temporalities of the church, sanction a regulation that puts more value upon the possession of money than upon character. The man who has money, whether he obtained it honestly or dishonestly, even though it be the price of blood, is given the most honorable seat, while the man who is too poor to pay pew rent, though his life and character may be a thousandfold more

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\*In Mr. Beecher's church, a few years since, one of the costliest front pews was bought at the annual auction by an agent of a noted prostitute, who insisted on taking her seat of honor until well paid for her relinquishment of the seat by the trustees.

valuable to the Church and world than all the gold of the millionaire, is put in the "poor corner," or crowded out altogether.

Had St. James been gifted with prophetic vision to behold this rise of the modern Church abomination, he could scarcely have described the evil more graphically or condemned it more severely than he has. The man with gold ring and goodly apparel, that is the man of wealth, is seated in the "good place" by this one-sided pew rent system, and the poor man must *stand* or *sit under a footstool*. Is not this respect of persons? Is not this "having men's persons in admiration because of advantage?"

This system is an equal injury to rich and poor, for while it gives an advantage to the rich so far as honor and comfort are concerned in hearing the truth, it mightily hinders their reception of the truth by pampering their pride and vanity. The power of wealth to engross the thought, win the affections, inflame the pride, and build up in every man's heart a feeling of self-sufficiency, has been fully portrayed in sacred writ, and our Lord declares, How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God. Surely men possessed of this world's goods encounter danger enough from the smiles and adulations of men through the week and from the deceptive character of their riches, without receiving from church officials in the sanctuary on the Lord's day the homage the world pays to wealth. Here, during the solemn hours of worship, and in the presence of his Maker, the rich

man ought to forget his riches, ought to strip off from himself all the adventitious circumstances that birth and fortune have brought him, and, on the same footing as his poorer neighbor, worship the common Father. The Church by the pew rent system perpetuates the distinctions of the mart, the shop, and the home, in the house of God. Men who enter our pew-rent churches on Sabbath find enough to remind them of the fact that some of them are still millionaires and some of them paupers; some still masters, and some servants. Worshippers are not there simply as worshippers, as *men* seeking a common pardon and a common salvation; they are there divided up into classes and groups, according to the size of their bank accounts.

This giving of the best pew to the wealthy man is but one of many similar favors accorded the rich in our large and fashionable churches, all of which are calculated to pamper pride and a feeling of self-importance that is extremely deleterious to the favored class, as it is to the Church itself. The warmth of greeting given the wealthy pew-holder, the deference paid to his views in the church councils, the kind consideration of his feelings that is often apparent in the public preaching, are quite as effective as the choice seat in giving him the impression that he is a very important pillar in the church, and that his views and feelings are entitled to a very great deal of attention and respect.

Is it anything but justice to the spiritual interests

of the man who encounters through the week the awful dangers arising from wealth, that the Church of God should, as far as possible, insist rigidly upon absolute equality in the treatment of rich and poor on the Sabbath? Would not the unwritten history of many of these large churches fully prove that this pampering of the rich on the part of church officials has not tended to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace?

Here, too, in the public worship the poor man ought to be graciously permitted to forget his poverty. He should not be made to occupy an inferior position and thus reminded of his inferior social scale. He should enter the Church of God not as a servant, or a pauper, or an inferior in any sense, but as a *man*, and rejoicing in the equality of the divine invitations and provisions of mercy, find himself among "brethren beloved." How is it? He finds our pew-rent churches imitating the railroad companies and the owners of opera houses and theatres, by providing first, second, and third-class accommodations, and as the "reserved seats" are beyond his reach he sinks by necessary gravitation into the cheaper and poorer ones, or stays away altogether.

"But," says the advocate of pew rents, "there is really little difference in the seats, and the same Gospel is preached to all." Granted that the same doctrines are preached to all *who attend church*, yet this does not do away with the iniquity of creating and fostering class distinctions among worshippers, nor the

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guilt of blockading the poor man's way to church, nor the sin of putting up the Gospel of Christ at public auction. St. James' denunciation is as applicable to the pew system after we admit this fact as before. Nor does it at all affect our objections to pew rents that the cheaper seats are sometimes as comfortable and convenient as the costliest ones.

There must be something to make the distinction between the "cheap" and the "costly" pews, and whether it be some difference in the pews themselves, or merely in their location, is a totally indifferent matter.

It matters little where the public estimation fixes the most valuable seats, whether in the front, middle, or rear of the church, or even in the gallery. The moment the Church gives that which the public opinion esteems most valuable to the rich, and that which the same public opinion pronounces the least valuable to the poor, the distinction has been made; she has had respect to persons and has virtually said to the rich man, Sit in a good place; to the poor, Sit under my footstool.

What if we admit that the same Gospel may be heard from the cheap pews and the gallery as from the costliest sitting in the church? Would this fact atone for the absence of thousands who are virtually shut out of the pew-rented churches, and, as a consequence, never hear the Gospel there at all?

## CHAPTER V.

## PEW RENTS UNNECESSARY AND INEXPEDIENT.

"Who hath required this at your hand?"—*Isaiah*.

"To the law and to the testimony."—*Isaiah*.

"For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders."—*Matthew*.

MOST church people will admit that pew rents have no scriptural authority, that there is much injustice and hardship to the poor in the system, that in theory all churches should be free, and that, at the best, pew rents are a necessary evil. And, accordingly, we find, when all other arguments have been given up, the advocates of the pew system falling back into this plea of necessity and expediency as the one impregnable line of defence. Has the illogical position occupied by such advocates, in defending as necessary to the Church of Christ that which is admittedly unauthorized, unjust, and unscriptural, never dawned upon themselves? If pew rents are incapable of scriptural defence or apology how can they be a necessity to a Church that is founded on scriptural authority and designed to teach the Scriptures to men?

It can hardly be said that pew rents are necessary to the existence and prosperity of the Christian Church,

since that existed and flourished long before churches were built. Nor can it be asserted that the voluntary system is inadequate to maintain the services of religion to-day, for there are many churches in our midst supported by the purely voluntary method, as were the earliest church services. To what, then, is the pew system a necessity? We answer it is a necessity only to the large and expensively managed churches, and to those that have incurred heavy obligations in the line of church luxuries. Magnificent edifices, expensive organs, salaried organists and singers, and cushioned and upholstered seats are church luxuries, legitimate enough, perhaps, if provided on scriptural methods, but by no means a necessity to the Christian Church. How far such an equipment of churches and such a use of church funds are in harmony with Gospel principles, is a question on which there is honest difference of opinion. So much is certain: these things are not necessary to the faithful preaching of the Word of Life, and if indulged in at all by a Christian people, must be regarded as luxurious conveniences rather than essentials in church management.

The writer is not among those who condemn large, commodious, and even beautiful edifices, for the worship of God. He sees nothing sinful in the use of an organ, the employment of an organist and paid singers, or a highly salaried minister. All of these may be lawful enough while they are, in the opinion of many, of very doubtful expediency. Such expenditures, however, can never become excuses for an unscriptural method

of raising money. They are necessary to a certain mode of church organization and, but they are by no means necessary to the proper performance of all true church work, and are, to say the least, very far removed from the simplicity of the Gospel.

Suppose, then, it be admitted for argument's sake, that these church luxuries cannot be had without pew rents, and that where heavy debt has been incurred in this direction, expenditure and income can be made to meet only by pew rents, does this demonstrate the necessity of the system to any church organized and conducted on a plan of Gospel simplicity?

If pew rents are essential to the highest financial success in church operations, why do churches that practise pew-renting raise the majority of their funds by the voluntary plan? Churches generally rent their pews for the payment of the church debt, or for the pastor's stipend, all the other funds being raised by voluntary donations. Surely, if the plan of making payment for church sittings compulsory be right and expedient, it would greatly simplify matters to make the entire annual contribution a charge upon the pews. Why should not our Educational Fund, our Superannuation Fund, our Missionary Fund be raised from pew rents? If it is lawful to tax the pew-holder for a part of the church expenditure, it is lawful to tax him for all. This would be but extending the advantages of the pew system to all the church funds as we have them now, it is claimed, in one or two. For example, one great advantage of the pew system as stated by its

advocates, is this: it compels those who abuse the free pew system by enjoying church privileges without contributing to church support, to pay their fair proportion into certain church funds. Why should not the same advantage be given the other church funds? Have the church debt and the pastor's claim any right to a monopoly of the advantages from pew rents?

Are there not thousands who "abuse" the voluntary system of raising the Missionary Fund, the Educational Fund, and the Superannuation Fund? Should not these men be compelled to "level up" on these funds as well as on the more favored ones?

It seems, indeed, but a natural deduction from these arguments urged in favor of the pew system, that all giving to the support of religion should cease to be voluntary and become a compulsory tax upon the pews.

What Church will earn the gratitude of all Christendom by first demonstrating the feasibility and expediency of raising all its funds from pew rents, that is, of making giving wholly *compulsory*, and of making men *benevolent* by *taxation*?

But is it an established fact that pew renting is a financial advantage in the raising of any church fund? Let it be granted that there is an increase of receipts from a certain class who would either pay nothing at all, or much less than under the pew system, is there not a larger proportionate decrease in the receipts from those who ought to give more than the pew taxation, and would give more if the system were voluntary? Do we not know that the financial ability of the

various attendants at church, differs far more widely than the taxation of the pews? Let us suppose that Mr. A., a working man, with a family of six persons and a yearly income of \$600, is required to pay \$20 a year for one of the cheapest pews. Mr. B., a wealthy capitalist, with family of three and an income of \$6,000 per year, ought to give at least \$200 for his pew. But no such proportionate giving exists, or can exist under the pew system. If Mr. B. gives \$50 a year for his pew, he feels he has done a meritorious deed and ought to be ranked as one of the pillars of the church. And the church officials and ministers, neglecting to teach the people the great scriptural obligation of giving "as God has prospered them," either tax the poor man far more, or the rich man far less than they ought. As long as pews are rented or sold, wealthy pew-holders will be well content to pay the current price, and will satisfy their consciences by the reflection that they pay more than their poor neighbors into the pew funds. But let the pews be open and free to all, and the matter of paying into the funds in proportion to ability be pressed upon their consciences as an obligation they owe to God, and we shall find rich men in many cases doubling or quadrupling their offerings. Would not the increase on the one hand equal the decrease on the other? If not, ought not churches to consider the blessedness of those who suffer "for righteousness' sake?" Surely, if direct taxation is the system under which the church debt, or the pastor's salary is to be raised, churches ought to have

as high a sense of justice as governments and municipal authorities, and tax according to the property possessed, or the income received. But let us admit for argument's sake that the increase under the voluntary system from the source indicated, would not equal the decrease. There are other sources from which increased receipts might be expected.

The removal of pew rents would doubtless result in a much larger church attendance, and in a large number of small offerings from those who do not attend, and will not attend, churches with pew rents.

If giving is, as the Scriptures teach, more blessed than receiving, if it develops, as we know it does, the noblest part of man's nature, then surely the Church ought to make every lawful effort to multiply the number of its benefactors and cultivate a more general spirit of benevolence and liberality among the masses. If the Church can reap the same, or nearly the same financial results from the multitude of small offerings, as from a small number of large donations, she ought by all means to prefer the former on account of the more general extension of benevolence among the people. And churches have always prospered more by the multitude of small offerings from the many than by the princely donations of the few.

The natural order of church growth and prosperity seems to be first an earnest evangelistic effort among the masses, that is among the poor, then as the masses become, through the Gospel, more and more enlightened and evangelized, there is an emergence of the

people out of poverty into affluence, and the consequent enriching of the church. This was the order in apostolic times and also under early Methodism. And thus the great reforms and mighty religious revivals of past ages have grown up among the common people. The Church should follow Christ's example and seek after the poor and needy, and grow strong in numbers and wealth with the growing numbers and wealth of the people.

The pew system seeks to reverse the natural order of growth and prosperity by courting the presence, favor, and support of the wealthy and cultured, that is of the minority, and neglecting the masses. This is very short-sighted policy, for as fast as men embrace Christianity they become prosperous and the better able to support all the institutions of the Church. The Christian poor of to-day are the rich of to-morrow.

Poor people more generally give to church support than the rich, and more generously too. Any system, therefore, that hinders general church attendance on the part of the masses, must necessarily cut off a large number of small offerings to church support. And these, with increased donations from the rich under the voluntary system and under proper religious instruction would, we think, fully counterbalance any decrease in other sources of income resulting from the adoption of free pews.

## CHAPTER VI.

PEW RENTS A HINDRANCE TO THE CULTIVATION  
OF CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE.

"Not because I desire a gift : but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."—*Paul*.

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."—*Paul*.

IT is doubtless the purpose of God in committing the evangelization of the world to men to train and perfect in every Christian heart the grace of benevolence. Especially is it for this purpose that the support of the services of religion has been left as a perpetual obligation upon the Church, in place of being divinely provided in some miraculous manner. God desires "fruit that may abound to our account," the cultivation of the "willing mind," that is, the generous disposition. To this same end the Church of Christ is built on self-denial, being composed of men who have learned to deny self, bear the cross, and follow Christ. The service of Christ, though one of love, is yet one of constant self-sacrifice, calculated from its very nature to develop in us the spirit and mind of the Divine Master.

No duty required at the Christian's hands has a

more intimate connection with the growth of the Christ-like spirit within him, than that of giving to the support of the Church and the spread of the Gospel. Christians fail to understand the greatness of their responsibility and the greatness of their privilege in the consecration of their worldly goods to the cause of God. And ministers, it is to be feared, fail to give the instruction they should to the Church of God on the nature of this Christian duty, and the blessings and privileges it confers on those who practise it. Giving ought to be an act of worship, and there can be no doubt the Christian who understands his true relation to God, and out of a full heart donates his substance to Christ's cause, realizes that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Now, in order that giving may prove acceptable to God and full of blessing to the giver, it must have certain essential characteristics. First, the act must be spontaneous, and hence it differs from most of the giving prescribed under the Law. The laws requiring sacrifices marked out the various requirements at the hands of the pious Jew, varying with circumstances, services, and seasons. Yet, in connection with all of these compulsory sacrifices there were various kinds of voluntary peace offerings, which afforded scope for the expression and cultivation of true devotion and benevolence. Under the Gospel we are free from the "law of commandments contained in ordinances," and all our giving should be ennobled by its purely voluntary character. Our giving, under the light, love, and

grace of God manifest in the Gospel, is to be like our praises, the spontaneous outflow of hearts in sympathy with Christ. Secondly, giving, if it would realize the fulness of divine blessing and the richest return to the Christian's own heart, must be pure and simple sacrifice, without thought of any selfish consideration or return. Self-interest must not be taken into account; there must be nothing of the nature of exchange or barter about it. The moment you introduce into the transaction any selfish interest, that moment you rob giving of its noblest characteristic, pure unselfishness, and destroy in a large degree its power to elevate and ennoble the character. When a selfish object is held out to view and becomes a factor to any extent in the giving, to that extent the action ceases to be benevolent and sinks into a bargain. Sacrifice, or the giving up of one's right or interest, exists in every act of barter upon the mart, but the sacrifice is supposed to be mutual between buyer and seller, and no one claims any merit therefor. The giving that Christ pronounced more blessed than receiving, is the making of sacrifice to or for another, without consideration of any return whatever. This, and this alone, cultivates true benevolence and fulfils the design of God. And this certainly ought to be kept constantly in view in all church schemes and operations for raising money. The people ought to be educated on the line of pure benevolence, and the Church, following out the design of God, ought to teach the people to give regularly, proportionately, and freely. Giving would thus be-

come a part of worship, acceptable to God, and rich in blessing to all practising it.

Pew rents make giving to church funds a matter of practical compulsion, and hence, as we have shown, there can be no true development of the grace of liberality by such a system. It may, indeed, be said men are not compelled to take pews, as, with equal truth, it may be said men are not compelled to eat, yet the alternative is such that the system is practically compulsory. "But," says an objector, "there is abundant room for the exercise of the voluntary principle along with the pew system in the raising of the various church funds." True, there is room for the exercise of the voluntary principle, yet, so far as pew rents cover the ground of church benevolence, they are a hindrance and not a help. Men who have been taught to expect a *quid pro quo* in the pew system do not take so readily to the sacrifice of their wordly goods where no selfish advantage of any kind is apparent. The proof of this is found in the large number of pew-holders who are not represented at all, or very illly represented, in the Missionary, Educational, and Superannuation Funds of the churches. Men, in their lack of true generosity, eagerly seize upon that which has some appearance of the genuine article and yet yields a direct return to themselves, and then close up their hearts against all claims made on the purely voluntary system. Many who rent pews, though they may be ever so selfish in their action, are too often quite ready to take credit for generosity and make pew-renting an

excuse for withholding from nearly all the claims of religion.

Again, pew rents hinder the cultivation of true benevolence by placing the burden of church support on a basis of barter. Men are called upon to pay into the church funds certain sums, not so much on account of their obligation to God as on account of their obligation to the church for a legal monopoly of a comfortable seat. Hence the vast majority of people, in renting a pew or buying one at public auction, never even think of their obligations to God. They are paying for their pews and thus giving proof of their honesty, but never imagine themselves any the more generous on that account. They receive so much church accommodation and privilege, and pay therefor so much money. This is barter, pure and simple, and not generosity. Nor is it so much for the mere accommodation as for the privileges that the majority pay. There is something in the possession of a pew, especially "in a good place," in the respectable society to which it introduces the owner, in the power to control it at will, in the tacit right enjoyed by the pew-holder to decide who beside himself and family shall occupy it, that is exceedingly gratifying to the pride of man's heart. And for these rights and privileges, with the Gospel included, the man feels as much bound to pay as for the seat he occupies at the opera. Surely it was not of such "giving" that the Saviour spake when He declared it more blessed to give than to receive.

The mere pew accommodation in every church con-

secrated to God ought to be as free as the Gospel itself ; the rights and privileges that are tacitly conferred on every pew-holder, and which are so dear to human pride and vanity, ought never to be given by the Church of God, much less made articles of merchandise. This feature of the pew-rent system vitiates entirely its power to cultivate benevolence and liberality among the people.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE WEEKLY OFFERING SYSTEM THE "MORE EXCELLENT WAY."

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"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."—*Paul*.

"Freely ye have received, freely give."—*Christ*.

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JUDAISM had its vast number of rules and regulations prescribing each religious service, and even the number, weight, or value of each sacrifice required. Christianity burst the bonds of Judaism and emerged into religious freedom. But this freedom is greatly misunderstood by many. It is not a freedom from obligation and responsibility, but from those narrow and sectarian views of these things which are no more adapted to the perfect Christian system than the garments of childhood to adult life. If there is, therefore, under Christianity no exact prescription as to the amount of contributions required for the support of religion, it is not because there is no obligation as under Judaism, but because the obligation is one that cannot well be measured and defined. The obligations imposed by Christianity for the financial support of religion are so broad and deep and comprehensive that they are best expressed by some

general precept like our Lord's, "Freely ye have received, freely give." When measured by the standard of privilege enjoyed under Judaism, the Christian's privileges are almost infinitely greater, and hence his obligations to support religion must be proportionately increased. If, then, the justice of the rule, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," be admitted, and if, as scholars estimate, the total contribution of the pious Jew ranged somewhere between one-third and one-fifth of his annual income, let the candid Christian ask himself, How much, under the light and blessing of Christianity, ought I to give for the support of religion and the evangelization of a world? As to the method of giving, the New Testament is nearly as destitute of directions as it is regarding the amount. Doubtless where the great fundamental principles of religion are adhered to, much is left to choice and to the varying circumstances of time and place. The nearest approach to a prescribed method in giving is, perhaps, that contained in 1 Cor. xvi. 2, and quoted at the head of the chapter.

Here we have the outline of the voluntary weekly offering system, a method of church support that has been adopted with the happiest results in many places, and that is at once systematic, scriptural, reasonable, expedient, and successful. The practical working of the system is as follows: The Finance Committee of each congregation at the beginning of the Church year makes an estimate of the total amount of annual ex-

penditure in the equipment and management of the Church services. This amount divided by fifty-two, the number of Sabbaths in the year, gives the expenditure necessary for each Sabbath, and consequently the amount of weekly offering required from the entire congregation. An effort is then made to obtain pledges of weekly contributions sufficient to cover the weekly expenditure (allowing for the customary difference between subscriptions and cash receipts), and this being secured, but little more is necessary. Envelopes with blank for name and date are supplied to subscribers, a financial secretary is appointed to receive and credit the weekly contributions, and the scheme is ready for trial.

Now, in favor of this plan of church support, let it be noted, first, that it is *systematic*. There is a regular fixed time and place for the contributions. It cannot well be forgotten as each Sabbath service brings it fresh to the memory. It becomes, after a little practice, so habitual as to seem a necessary part of the worship. Its accounts are easily kept, and mistakes can either be avoided or easily corrected. It pays the year's expenditure as the year passes, allowing no account to run behind, as under the pew system or the "quarterly plan" of payment. It has all the advantage over the pew system that the cash business has over the credit system.

Secondly, the plan is *Scriptural*, in that it harmonizes with the examples and precepts of Scripture, makes giving voluntary and proportionate, and

is based upon Apostolic recommendation to the Church at Corinth. The most remarkable and praiseworthy examples of giving to the support of religion recorded in the Scripture are those which gave full play to the voluntary principle. In the erection of the tabernacle it was not taxation that secured such large and liberal donations from the people. Moses said, "Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering to the Lord." Every man was at liberty to give or not to give, and anything offered in the right spirit would be acceptable. The people take time to consider, and then "they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whose spirit made him willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation." The men brought "blue and purple, and skins and wood," and the women brought "bracelets and earrings and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold." And such was the spirit of liberality begotten in their hearts that they brought "much more than enough," and had to be "restrained from bringing." Such are the offerings pleasing to contemplate and acceptable to God, for the Lord loveth the cheerful giver.

Again, in the erection of the temple we see a magnificent testimony to the efficiency of the voluntary principle in securing resources for the services of religion. Dr. Brown says: "The donations of David and his people astonish us by their magnitude. In addition to the immense sums which he had amassed dur-

ing his reign for the building of the temple, he, on the occasion referred to, devoted to this pious purpose what is equivalent to about *eighteen millions* of our money; and his people's joint contributions considerably exceeded *thirty millions*." All the contributions of all the Christian Churches on the face of the earth for all missionary purposes, it is said, fall immeasurably short of this single offering on the part of ancient Israel and her king. There was first a great assembly of all the valiant men, the princes of the tribes, the captains of the thousands, the captains of the hundreds, and stewards of all the possessions and substance of the king, and his sons, with the officers and mighty men in Jerusalem. There was doubtless first a consultation between David and his "mighty men," then a presentation of the financial claims of religion, followed by a general and generous response. And "the people rejoiced for that they offered willingly to the Lord, and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."

The widow of Sarepta, who in the extremity of poverty and in time of famine hesitated not to give the last of her small store to feed the Lord's prophet, thus placing herself in entire dependence on Providence, and the poor widow who "out of her penury" cast two mites, "even all her living," into the treasury, have both been immortalized by our Lord's commendation —a commendation that would never have been uttered had the sacrifice been compulsory.

Again, this voluntary weekly offering is in perfect harmony with the precepts, promises, exhortations, and

warnings of Scripture respecting giving to God's cause and generosity toward mankind. All of these imply that giving is to be a voluntary matter, and that in this consists its chief virtue. Take for example: "Honour the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase." "To do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." "He that giveth, let him do it with liberality." "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

Again, the weekly offering plan commends itself to all church members and attendants as an eminently *reasonable* one. Its claim upon every one is in proportion to his ability, "as God has prospered him," and is at once so clear and just and easily met that the system is necessarily popular with the people. Nor can it be questioned that it is by far the most *expedient* and *successful* method yet devised for developing the grace of liberality in the Church, and securing needed funds for the support of religion.

For surely, if it be blessed to give to God's cause occasionally as under the pew system, it is more blessed to give frequently and regularly as under the weekly offering plan. The mind and heart of the worshipper are beneficially affected every time an offering is made unto the Lord, and therefore the weekly offering has

many advantages over the irregular system of payment under pew rents. Again, the giving required under this weekly offering plan of church support is in connection with the religious services of God's house, and is much more apt to become a part of worship than the quarterly settlement of an account for pew rent with some church official.

No other system of church support can secure as large financial returns as the weekly offering, with so little embarrassment to the givers. The vast majority of those contributing to church support can give their ten, twenty, or fifty cents a week very much more easily than they can contribute the aggregate once a quarter or once a year. This is so well understood and appreciated wherever it is tried that the plan soon becomes very popular with the people.

May the voluntary weekly offering soon supersede the unscriptural pew system in all our Churches !  
**AMEN.**



## CHAPTER VIII.

## OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS.

"We must obey God rather than men." *Peter.*

"For we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also of all men." *Paul.*

THAT the abolition of pew rents in any church long accustomed thereto would be attended with difficulty, there can be little doubt. There is always more or less conservatism among the people in regard to church polity and policy. And hence the giving up of a system of church management, sanctioned by general and long-established usage, a system commonly lauded for its financial advantages, and very acceptable to the majority of the genteel and wealthy classes, would, of necessity, be something of a revolution in church life. Abandonment of pew rents for a purely voluntary system of church support would doubtless appear to many like the giving up of order for confusion—the relinquishment of certain returns for doubtful gains. Such a proposal would meet little favor at the hands of that large class of people, who, when once satisfied that any measure or custom pays financially, are not over scrupulous as to the principles involved. The public conscience, not

withstanding the multitude of our churches and the success of their work, is far from being as sensitive as it should be on matters of general policy, and hence the ethics of many a public question is lost sight of in the consideration of its dividends.

Let us look for a few moments at some of the objections often urged against the adoption of free pews.

First, it may be said, and probably with some degree of truth, that many pew-holders would not continue in attendance if pew rents were abolished and with them the absolute and legal control conferred by that system upon the pew-holder. The adoption of free pews, whilst it would not necessitate the giving up of one's particular seat, would certainly involve a very great curtailment in the rights and privileges of the occupant, and put his tenure of the seat upon an altogether different basis. Men are generally sensitive regarding their rights and privileges, and more especially so if they have financial investments therein. This would most likely prove true of that large class of respectable church attendants who are better known and more highly valued for their wealth and social position, than for their humility and devotion. In all probability many of this class would resent any new arrangement by which their absolute control of pews would be diminished, and look with little favor on a system that would give them no particular advantage over their dependents in the house of God. Let such people once understand that

under the voluntary system no choice of seat would be given for money's sake—that, whilst a regular seat might be assigned them on condition of becoming regular attendants, no seat would be kept vacant after a certain hour; and that, in short, the entire spirit of church management would be that of a republic rather than a plutocracy—and in all probability many of them would immediately seek a church home elsewhere. Some of this class would prove open to argument, and might be disposed to give free pews a trial; but that the purse-proud and irreligious, who have become accustomed to pew rents, would reject so plebian a system as free pews may be regarded as certain.

These difficulties must be faced, and certain losses must be sustained, if pew rents are abandoned, and the scriptural and voluntary method adopted. What should ministers and official church members do in such a case? If convinced that pew rents are unscriptural and evil, they ought to abandon them, no matter what the consequences may be. If they cannot please God and their fellowmen, they must offend their fellowmen. "We must obey God rather than men." If need be they must be ready to make sacrifices for principle in church affairs, as they are taught to do in private life. Church officials are clearly bound to conduct the church on scriptural principles and in harmony with the great doctrines of human brotherhood and equality. If men cannot be pleased and retained in a congregation by scriptural methods, the church

must bear their loss. Woe to the church that covets the presence and favor of rich worldlings more than the presence and favor of God !

But whilst there would doubtless be this class of "irreconcileables" in every congregation, it may safely be presumed that the vast majority of church members and attendants would, under proper instruction, readily perceive the reasonableness of the free-pew system, and soon become convinced of its advantages in a financial as well as a spiritual point of view. And whilst there would be a loss on the one hand in attendance and support by the adoption of free pews, there would be on the other hand, as we have shown elsewhere, a gain in both attendance and support from that class of people that has always been readiest to receive and support the Gospel. Righteousness exalts a nation—will it not do as much for a church ? Shall we discard principle for the sake of popularity ? Shall we esteem the favor of man of more value in church work than the favor of God ? Church life and prosperity depend upon the divine blessing, and this secured, the Church of Christ can bear unmoved the loss of a few adherents.

Akin to the objections already urged against free pews is the assertion that some churches that have long been dependent upon pew rents for meeting the church debt, would be seriously embarrassed, or perhaps compelled to close their doors without them. We are convinced that in the majority of cases the burden of the church debt might be shifted from pew rents to

voluntary donations. Let an appeal for annual free-will offerings be made to the people in behalf of the church debt. Let the matter of giving be presented as a duty and a privilege, and pressed home upon the conscience of the people. Let the rich be urged to give proportionately, freely and generously, bearing the burden of their poorer brethren. In a majority of cases the people would respond to such appeal, and feel all the happier for giving with "willing mind" what they had formerly been compelled to pay by taxation.

But suppose that a church here and there throughout this land of churches, should be called upon to choose between continuing its career by a method of support which it regarded as unscriptural, and closing its doors for the sake of principle, and should choose the latter alternative and die—would not such death be blessed? Could not its pastor preach a sermon over its decease very appropriately from the text, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord?" The death of such a church, resulting from firm adherence to scriptural principles, would prove a powerful tonic to our modern Christianity, which, as some people imagine, needs a little more of the martyr spirit. The pastor, thus freed from his labors among an over-churched people, and fired by the enthusiasm which the martyr-death of his church might be supposed to impart, could set about raising a regiment of volunteer missionaries for heathendom. And surely there would be many volunteers among the ministers of a people that

has the Gospel in such abundance that small towns and villages can sport a Protestant church for every hundred inhabitants, while China has only one missionary to the million of her people. Who knows but this, after all, is what we need—a few deaths among the churches, a little weeding out, that there might be more life? Some churches, by a martyr-death such as we have been contemplating, would, like Samson, destroy more enemies in a dying hour than they had in a life-time. The spectacle of such a death would be edifying to both saint and sinner, and in many places where churches are planted so thickly that ministers are half starved and congregations needlessly burdened, the demise would not cause inconsolable grief among the remaining churches. What becomes of the argument, then, so frequently used by dishonest people and by churches: We cannot live by legitimate means, and we *must* live? Why *must*? The case of a church *in extremis* from pure adherence to scriptural usages would excite general attention. Will trustee boards consider this?

"But," says another objector, "I favor pew rents because I think that every attendant at church should have a regular seat, and that families should sit together." Doubtless, it is much better that attendants have regular seats in church. One soon becomes so accustomed and attached to a church seat that he finds a comfort of body and tranquility of mind while enjoying it, which he cannot experience in any other seat in the church. Habit rules here as elsewhere.

The scriptural direction that "all things be done decently and in order," requires the allocation of seats to regular attendants. There is even stronger reasons why families should attend church as families, their members sitting together in the house of God. There can thus be much better supervision of the younger members; the worship becomes more attractive and profitable; the ties of family and of church becoming interwoven, and increasingly powerful for good. But why not have allocated seats as well with free pews as under a system of pew rents? In all free-pew churches with which we are acquainted, the seats are allocated *in the order of application, each applicant having choice of all vacant seats.* This secures the advantages of the pew system without its evils. It is, of course, assumed that under free pews no such absolute control of the seat belongs to the occupant as is given under pew rents; yet so far as his own personal enjoyment of the seat is concerned he has little cause of complaint.

But the greatest objection remains. Free pews have always been and always will be abused by a large class of persons who are abundantly able to render the church financial support, and yet will occupy the most eligible seats and contribute little or nothing. And is not the pew system abused? Do men give at all proportionately under that system? Do not the poor give too much, and the rich far too little? But let us look at the objection. It has a two-fold aspect, as we consider the interests of the church on

the one hand, and the interests of the class of people referred to, on the other. So far as the church is concerned, the only loss to it is a financial one, which we have elsewhere shown it can well afford to make in view of increased returns from other sources. So far as the people themselves are concerned, it can scarcely be claimed that pew rents would render them at all generous, or that free pews would have a tendency to make them niggardly. It is true that men will pay for a seat under the pew system, and sponge their church living under the free pews, but the payment under pew rent is not generosity, and the failure to give freely and generously under free pews is no proof that the men have become penurious by the influence of free pews. Many a man, before losing his position in genteel society and his honored place in the church, will submit to a heavy taxation under pew rents, and, perhaps, take a great deal of credit to himself for generosity. The same man will give little or nothing under free pews, you say. Yet he is as generous in the one case as the other, and, so far as the man is concerned, there is very much to be gained by the free pew system. In the first place, he will come to a better understanding of himself under free pews. He will see that the forty dollars which he paid yearly under pew rents, as he supposed, generously, "with a willing mind," has dwindled down to one-fourth that sum when left to the promptings of his own heart. Such a revelation of the man to himself is one of the greatest blessings

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that could come to a penurious man. Secondly, there is much more likelihood of proper instruction upon the subject of liberality under the free-pews system than under pew rents. The voluntary system would seem to require this indoctrination of the people in the grace of liberality, and at least an occasional setting forth of the duty of generous, proportionate and systematic support of the Church of God. There is much better chance, then, for the development and training of Christian liberality under the voluntary system than under pew rents.



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## APPENDIX.

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### I.

#### THE PEW SYSTEM—IS IT REASONABLE, EQUITABLE, EXPEDIENT, SCRIPTURAL?

*A paper read before the London Congregational Board,*

BY THE REV. NEWMAN HALL, LL.B.

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THE pew rent system may, in its generic character, be illustrated by that of theatres, concerts, lectures, and similar entertainments. Seats are classified according to their advantages of position, and prices are regulated accordingly. The only qualification is, not capacity to appreciate, but only competence to pay. Thus, the more wealthy and the best attired are in the front places; the poorer, are in the back benches and upper galleries. At a concert may be seen persons, whose late arrival, heedless behaviour, and early departure, indicate how little they value the performance for itself; while others, in remote corners, show, by rapt attention, a passionate love for music itself. The immediate object of the managers is to secure a financial success, and to this all their arrangements are

subservient. The children of this world are wise in their generation.

The pew rent system is similar in its main features. But it has this important distinction, that it invites the entrance of others than seat-holders. In most cases free seats are set apart for the poor, and soon after the commencement of service, if not before, places not actually occupied are open to all comers. Still the fact remains that in the majority of our churches precedence is given to those who can afford to pay the best prices; that others are often kept standing till the service begins, when the best seats may all have been taken possession of, and so it comes to pass that generally the more wealthy sit together in the front, while the poor are found in the back seats and the galleries.

1. *Is this system reasonable?* A Christian Church is a society of believers. The qualification is not wealth, but faith and holiness. The object of assembling is not to provide an entertainment which shall be a financial success, but to worship God, to nourish piety, and convert sinners. Viewed in relation to these objects, is the pew system reasonable? A seat-renter may select a church because it is fashionable, or the service imposing, the music good, the preacher eloquent, original, amusing, yet without love for the worship of God itself. Still, if he can pay the regulation price, he can occupy one of the most convenient or conspicuous seats, while others, who worship in spirit and truth, and aid every sermon by prayer, are treated as strangers. They have no familiar seat of their own,

dear by many sacred associations; but, after waiting near the door, go hither and thither, "having no certain dwelling-place," and often, by the seat they find, illustrating that, while many that are last as to piety are first as to place, others who are first in the eyes of God are last in those of the pew-opener.

Congregationalists, who hold that the church consists only of believers, profess that for their religious welfare the public services are in the first instance designed. In receiving to membership and the Sacred Supper we make no distinction. From peer to peasant alike we demand nothing more and nothing less than Scriptural faith and consistent life. Moreover, as advocates of the voluntary principle, we profess to rely on the free-will offerings of the people according to their ability. We are not under the law, but under grace. The question is how far the pew system is in harmony with these objects and professions, and, therefore, how far it is reasonable?

2. *Is it equitable?* Do seat-holders contribute in proportion to benefits received and ability to pay? Pew rents are generally appropriated to the support of the minister. But his work is not confined to preaching. He has the grave responsibility of presiding over a society, to preserve which in peace, purity, and usefulness, requires no ordinary combination of zeal with prudence, firmness with forbearance, and a constant vigilance which may be the more effectual when the less obvious. He has to guide the perplexed and comfort the sorrowing in private. He is the re-

tained counsellor of his people, any one of whom has a right to resort to him or send for him to advise them in any case of difficulty. If time and strength prevent more frequent visitation, he is always expected in the sick-room and in the house of mourning.

Is all this to be recognized only by the hire of so many square inches of oak or fir, entitling the tenant to precedence at two public services which often represents the smaller half of a pastor's labors? A mere outsider, who comes only twice a week, pays as much as a member or even officer of the church, who attends all the meetings, shares all its privileges, and, next to his own dwelling, esteems it his home. Is it equitable that by paying for two public services a rental no larger than that paid by the stranger, he shall be thought to discharge his pecuniary obligation to the church? Moreover, he may owe his own salvation to the church, and with it his temporal prosperity; he may owe to it the salvation of his children. Yet his obligation is measured by that of the stranger, and he pays for his sitting. Is the ministry for the sittings, or for the hearers? Does the value of the sermon depend on the position of the pew? Does the spiritual good resulting dwindle as the sittings recede or the rents diminish? If the ministry is not for the wooden seats but for living souls, then it is equitable that these, wherever they sit, should contribute according to their individual capacity and sense of obligation. But in the pew system this measure of equity has no place.

Suppose a bachelor or widow with £1,000 a year

pays for one sitting £2; while a clerk or trader with wife and six children needs eight sittings. But having only £250 a year, he takes inferior seats at half the price, and pays for eight seats £8. With an income four times less than that of his neighbor, he pays four times as much in actual cash. But as his income is four times less, he proportionately pays sixteen times more. But wife and six children entail certain expenses absolutely beyond his control, so that the fund on which he can draw for religious purposes is further diminished, and, therefore, his contribution is relatively increased. On the other hand, if the family man with £250 equitably pays £8, notwithstanding family expenses, the man with £1,000, and no such expense, instead of £2, surely ought to pay £32.

Take another illustration of inequity. A man with a thriving trade may well afford to take a pew at a high rental. But reverses come. It would injure his credit, wound his social feelings, disturb his devotion, to change his sitting, which, in equity to his creditors and family, he cannot pay for as before. Would it not be more just to allow him to assess himself at a lower rate? Or, if his income steadily increases, might he not feel it positively unjust to continue to pay only the comparative pittance which was asked for his seat when he was straitened in resources? Again, a man of wealth and large family has a pew of eight or ten seats. In process of time his children get settled in life. He and his wife are left alone.

They give up the sittings no longer wanted, and keep two. They are richer than ever, they have fewer expenses, and contribute far less. This is the pew system. Is it equitable? It may be said with truth that many generous members of congregations contribute large sums for special objects and the missions of the Church, and so make up for the small sum paid for their pew. But this does not interfere with our argument which has to do with contributions specially for the support of divine worship and the ministry.

3. *Is it expedient?* Some may say, "The principle is objectionable in the abstract, but revenue forbids its relinquishment." Is this so? As regards the rich, does it not lessen contribution? Fix a trade-price, and the wealthiest are content to pay what is charged. Rich and poor alike give the market value for commodities, irrespective of their intrinsic worth. Many a rich seat-holder would think it ostentatious or invidious to offer more than the regulated sum, which he would double or quadruple if left to his own sense of obligation. Many who love the Gospel, and ardently admire and extol the minister, would be ashamed to put down, as their voluntary tribute of appreciation the paltry sum they pay with perfect satisfaction when it is the full price charged. Is there not many a church where seat-rents are low because renters are few, whose pastor is exposed to positive privation, although there may be one or two persons of wealth among his people, and several traders able to put by their hundred a year or more? There are men who

with wealth have generous hearts, who would liberally respond to their obligations, but whom the system of hiring so many feet of benches renders slow to understand their privilege and duty ; so that they recognise their minister's services by a measure they would be ashamed to apply, I will not say to their doctor or lawyer, but even to their cook, their groom, their scullery-maid. I remember once dining at the house of a wealthy merchant who, though he loved the house of God and faithful preaching, yet was not remarkable for generous contributions, and who said to me across the table that at church that day his thoughts had wandered by calculating that in the course of about thirty years he had paid some £200 in pew rents. It was, perhaps, rude in me ; but my spirit was stirred to reply, "And more, sir, for blacking the shoes of your household." After a pause he frankly said, "That is true." I heard no more from him about the payment of pew rents, as if it were an example of generosity. Under a better system would not such as he be ashamed of so low an estimate of obligation ?

If, under a voluntary assessment, the rich would often give more than a fixed sum, many of the poor, who, by the present system are excluded altogether, would become contributors. By the poor man's church is sometimes meant a church supported by the rich for the benefit of the poor. They who provide the money expect to direct the procedure. They who receive benefits, at no cost, are generally expected to be grateful without interfering. But surely the poor man's

church is the church where he has an equal status with the rich ; where he shares in the privilege of contributing both to the ministry and the expenses ; where, giving according to his means, he is on an equality with the largest subscriber, and does not feel that in the highest of all relationships he is pauperized, but that the church is to him, equally with those most favored in worldly circumstances, his own spiritual place and home, for which he prays, for which he works, for which he gives.

Objection may be taken to any change, from a sincere apprehension that selfish people will take undue advantage of it; while, perhaps, in some cases, the objection may be prompted by the apprehension that a free system would entail large contributions from the objectors themselves. But my own conviction is that the increased gifts of the rich, with the numerous contributions of small sums from the poor, who, after all, are the most constant and generous givers according to their ability, would result in an increase of revenue ; and this is confirmed by the experience of many churches where a voluntary assessment has been substituted for a fixed rental.

It is, perhaps, too much to hope that this principle may be carried out in large and wealthy congregations where the present system is amply adequate for the pastor's salary and all expenses. But if it were carried out, each giving not according to what his own church needs, but to what the ministry in general deserves, a large surplus fund might be created for the aid of small

congregations, and to supplement the stipends of pastors inadequately sustained.

Any attempt to displace an established system, "the time-honored institutions of our fathers," is liable to be objected to till some better plan is fully developed and tested. As if any new plan could be tested before it is tried. Let us settle principles, and ways and means will follow. "But," says some kind friend, "suppose, meanwhile, the ministry should suffer by inadequate support?" I ask, in reply, "Is it adequately supported under the present system?" In the rear of a few pastors who, not from superior generosity, but only from larger numbers, receive ample support, though seldom half what such men could earn in secular employ, there are hundreds of others no less cultured, zealous, and godly, whose studies are disturbed and minds depressed and energies crippled and social influence weakened by stipends inadequate for present necessities, still more for future contingencies. Is it not pardonable in their interests that some, who will not be suspected as pleading for themselves, should speak out on this question, and suggest to the churches and their officers their responsibilities and privileges?

But suppose that for a brief period there should be a difficulty, as in multitudes of other cases, the passing pain might lead to a permanent cure. If a principle is right let us adopt it and trust the result. There was a brief period in which St. Paul's congregation failed to supply his need. Instead of starving and instead of begging, he took to trade and stitched tent

cloth. I'll be bound he did it well. No such cloth as his was offered in the market at Corinth. They that are best fitted for the ministry are generally fit for other work also. Let them, as a little pleasant change, become successors of the apostles by being lay preachers as they were. Let them, if necessary, show their independence by "working with their own hands;" and very soon those who are "taught in the Word" would feel that in obeying the command to "communicate unto Him that teacheth in all good things," they were not dealing a dole but discharging a debt. A little variation of industry would not necessarily do us harm. It might increase the muscularity of our Christianity and the wholesomeness of our theology. Then, when the whole energies were again devoted to the ministry, that ministry might be more useful and better appreciated than before. Then, with voluntary offerings from the many, winged with willingness, not weighted by a tariff, our pastors, who, in spite of all that may be said against the apostolic method of the ministry being supported by the people, are amongst the most fearless, would be, if possible, more fearless still; knowing that a ministry honest and outspoken, being no respecter of persons, is most likely to be honored in its honesty, when it rests on the entire Christian community, instead of a section of its wealthier members, however generous they may be.

Another suggestion is not unworthy of notice. There are some young men whose early training, peculiar sensitiveness, or notions—right or wrong—of what is

due to a Christian gentleman, may cause them to regard with disfavor a mode of ministerial support by the hiring of seats as for a place of amusement. If their own fathers show their regard for their pastors by taking so many sittings, their sons may, perhaps prefer some other church where, though the stipend is smaller, the mode of obtaining it is more to their taste. Here, again, comes the question of expediency. Is the pew system likely to deter from our ministry some young men whom we may be loth to lose from our ranks? Thus a change may prove expedient, both financially and in the supply of ministers.

But there is a higher expediency. This is tested, not by revenue, but by spiritual prosperity. Would another system be less repellent to the outside world, whom we wish to attract in order to save? Would strangers feel less like intruders, be more ready to repeat their visit and bring others, and so, after a while, increase the church by new converts? Would a more voluntary system tend to raise the tone of church life, binding all classes in closer sympathy, confidence, and mutual interest? Would it increase love for the ministry, and so promote its efficiency? Then would such change tend to the glory of Christ, and, therefore, would be expedient, even should revenue suffer. But all experience proves that spiritual prosperity secures a fuller treasury for every good work. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich."

*Is it Scriptural?* Does what we read of the equality in the early Church of all believers, irrespective of

worldly advantages, the spontaneity of service, the acceptableness only of "the cheerful giver," the rule of giving "every one according to his ability," and "as God has prospered every man,"—does this seem to favor the pew system? Imagine a congregation presided over by Paul, Peter, or James, with reserved seats for those who could pay high prices, including certain Jewish scribes, or Greek sophists, or spies, who had secured sittings in order to study the new religion, listen to a fresh style of eloquence, gratify curiosity, or gather materials for a criminal prosecution; these, along with the wealthier converts, taking front seats, while other poorer brethren, yet "beloved of the Lord, chosen to be saints," stand at the door waiting for vacant places!

If the pew system tends to secularize what is sacred; to introduce trade principles into the management of the household of faith; to lead church officers to measure ministerial success by the number of sittings let, and the amount of rents received; to encourage measures for obtaining money rather than winning souls; to treat the church as if it were a shop, and incur the Saviour's condemnation of those who made God's house of prayer a house of merchandise—if such is the tendency of the pew system, and thus opposed to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, can we expect in connection with it the utmost blessing we are encouraged to pray for?

Many texts might be cited to show how far the system is Scriptural; but there is one so specially ap-

licable, and so emphatic, that it needs no comment. "My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have regard unto him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool, are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" or, as in the margin of the Revised Version, "Do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts. Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him." (Jas. ii. 1-5.)

If on careful consideration, the pew system appears to be reasonable, equitable, expedient, and, above all, Scriptural, by all means let us uphold it. If otherwise, let us so modify it as to neutralize these objections, or let us abolish it altogether, assured that whatever is not in accordance with the mind of Christ cannot promote the prosperity of our churches or the success of our ministry; and that the most absolute submission to His authority is not only right, but will be found reasonable, equitable, and expedient also.

## II.

## THE CHURCHES AND THE MASSES.

*An Editorial taken from the TELEGRAM, Toronto.*

IS the time coming when the churches will be beyond the reach of the common people? It is a question if they are not beyond the reach of the common people now, for only the comfortable and contented classes are to be found in the great majority of the church pews. The explanation of this is, that the churches of the present age have become a luxury, and the toiling masses, to whom every dollar is a consideration, cannot afford to contribute towards their support. Contrast the churches of to-day with what they were twenty or thirty years ago, and observe the difference. The churches of to-day are splendid buildings and handsomely upholstered and fitted up with every consideration to comfort. The poor laboring man does not feel at home in them. He feels, in fact, that he has no business there, and so he stays at home. It costs a great deal of money to erect these fine churches, put in grand organs and maintain a pastor. Those who work hard for their living from one week's end to another and have a family to bring up, very often cannot afford to take a pew, and rather than be under obligations to those who have pews they sit about the

house and read or smoke. This is not a good example to set to the rising generation, but it is a true picture of many houses in Toronto. The laboring classes are beginning to say, when asked why they do not attend religious service, that the churches were not made for them but for the better classes, and the proof of what they say is made apparent to any person who looks about him and observes the well-dressed occupants of the adjoining pews. The churches are largely the luxury of the well-to-do. What is to be done? The laboring classes have souls to save as well as their more fortunate fellows. Little or no effort is made by the churches to go out into the highways and byways in search of sinners, and the result is that the sinners are left to themselves, and the ranks of the criminal classes are being steadily recruited. The abuse of liquor is one of the most crying evils of the age. Nine-tenths of the offences for which persons are brought before the courts are directly or indirectly the outcome of intemperance. Yet it is seldom that the occupants of the pulpits raise their voices against this growing evil. Why is this? The fact is, that the liberal use of liquor is common with the well-to-do classes who patronize and support the churches, and wealthy persons who are interested in the liquor traffic have their pews, and so the pulpit is dumb. The first thing to be done in the regeneration of the toiling masses is to do away with the idea that so commonly prevails that the churches are not for the masses. *Every church door should be open to all who*

wish to enter, and every church should make an organized effort to seek out the non-church-goers and prevail on them to attend the stated preaching of the Gospel, whether they can afford to contribute toward the support of the church or not. The spirit of unbelief is abroad, and people who would shrink from declaring themselves as atheists or infidels, or even unbelievers, take refuge in the ranks of the agnostics (who may be described as the Don't-Knows of Religion), and frankly admit that their faith is not as strong as it used to be. The churches will have to bestir themselves, or the result will be that the pews will be abandoned to the women and the children. As it is, the churches of all denominations are in danger of falling victims to the twin sins of lethargy and luxury.



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## III.

## PEW RENTS.

*An Editorial taken from the News, Toronto.*

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1. Can pew rents, as ordinarily carried out in town and city churches, be scripturally defended ?
  2. Does not the pew-rent system make an unwise and unscriptural distinction between rich and poor in the church ?
  3. Would not the substitution of the voluntary system for pew rents tend to larger church attendance and the spread of true religion generally ?
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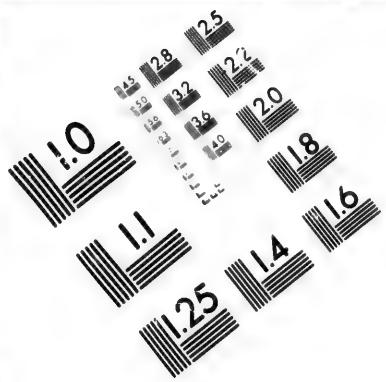
THE above questions, addressed in circular form to the *News*, elicited the following editorial reply:—

Theological topics are not exactly in our line, but having been asked three straight questions, we will give straight, unequivocal answers, which, though not dressed up in pulpit style, will be meant to express the opinions of the *News*. . . . The writer of the above questions will not accuse us of irreverence, if, in endeavoring to present the matter in a strong and truthful light, we travel a little outside of the ordinary lines of theological discussion. This paper believes in the Christian religion, in supporting churches and ministers, but not in pew rents, tax exemptions, or State aid of any kind.

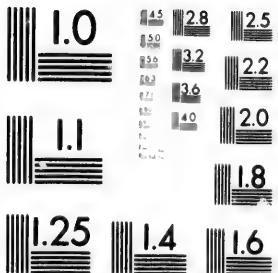
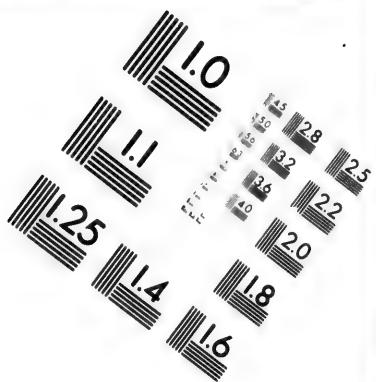
In answer to the first question, "Can the pew-rent system be scripturally defended?" there can be but one answer, and that is "No." It is possible that those learned in the text of the Bible, and the tricks of sophistry, may garble and distort a few verses into an apparent defence, but it doesn't seem hard for an honest layman to show that the pew business is opposed to every precept and example in the New Testament; it outrages the spirit of Divine teaching; it is in direct violation of the example of Him in whose actions Christians should find a model. Imagine for a moment the Sermon on the Mount having been preached to people in rented pews and reserved seats! Think of the Master opening His sermon, and looking at those in the front seats as He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Imagine Him saying, as the usher turned out a man, who, in his anxiety to hear His words, had got into a rented pew, "And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?" Think of the fashionable ushers collaring some tramps, and running them off the mountain while the Preacher is saying, "Take no thought of your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" How would it have seemed if, when Christ went abroad "Throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues, and healing every sickness and disease," the legend had been hung on the doors and

walls of the places of worship, "Seats free in the evening only."

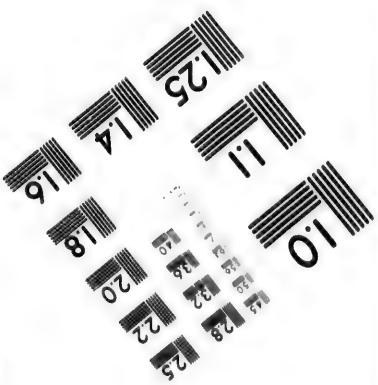
As to the second question, "Does not the pew-rent system make an unwise and unscriptural distinction between the rich and the poor in the church?" there is but one answer; that is emphatically "Yes." It would seem to the ordinary thinker that any distinction between the rich and the poor in the church would be unscriptural, and, if opposed to Divine precept and example, unwise. Let us look at it as the Great Teacher looked at it, and remember that the great climax of His mission was the good tidings of great joy, that "The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." This is shown by His reply, when John wondered and sent two of his disciples to ask, "Art Thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered, "Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." Last, but greatest of all, He seemed to place the fact that the poor had the Gospel preached unto them. It is not so in the churches run on the pew-rent system. The rich have cushioned pews and padded benches on which to kneel, while the poor must climb into the galleries or stay outside. This system makes the poor stay away from churches, and drives them into Salvation Armies. It frightens self-respecting strangers away from a church, for no man or woman with any



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dignity of character cares to intrude upon the privacy of a rented pew. Those of us who by mistake have been piloted to the pew of some narrow-minded churchman and were made to feel how unwelcome we were, will never forget the miseries of the experience. We can sympathize with the unfortunates who, by reason of their poverty or shabby dress, feel doubly the frigid reception they get when shown into the pew which they know belongs to some one else. Imagine how the poor, seedy, wayfaring sinner feels as the service goes on. He spends his time in wondering, with fear and trembling, whose pew he is in, when he should be thinking of "The peace of God which passeth all understanding." He looks at the people who sit staring frigidly at the strange person in Squire Smith's pew, and he thinks of the unkindness of the rich instead of "The exceeding richness of His grace in His kindness towards us." Instead of thinking whether he will get thrown out of Heaven (if he ever gets there), he spends his time in reckoning up the chances as to whether the usher will leave him alone or lead him out by the ear. Instead of remembering the frown of an offended God, he is appalled by the scowl of Squire Smith, who glares at him from the far end of the seat. He imagines that even the preacher has spotted him as an intruder, and when he hears the denunciation of those who got too near the head of the table and were ordered out, the poor stranger glances over his shoulder at the door and wonders if anyone would kick him if he tried to escape. He

hears of him who went to the wedding without a proper garment, and as he sadly surveys his second-hand clothes he forgets the judgment-day, in the agony of being found at a fashionable church in somebody else's clothes and somebody else's pew. No, the rented pew system does not tend to attract strangers to divine service. Every rented seat is an anxious seat to the one who sits on it without paying the rent.

As to question No. 3 there is no doubt. The voluntary system is the only true way of raising money for the support of churches. It would tend to the spread of true religion, because it would not drive the poor away from the doors. There will be no pew rents in Heaven, unless we have been incorrectly informed, and it has always been our idea of a church that it should be run on a heavenly rather than on a business basis. The poor have enough to contend with in this world without erecting barriers which tend to keep them from that which was given without money and without price.



## IV.

## PEW RENTS.

*The following Questions concerning the Pew System and Editorial Answer, are taken from the New York CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE :*

Do you believe in pews? Is it not a godless way of distinguishing the rich and the poor in God's house? Does not the curse of Almighty God fall on any church that does it? Did any body ever hear of a great revival in a church where the seats were not free?

WE suppose you mean in renting pews in churches for the support of the Gospel. Where the Gospel can be supported, and the social and family life of the church sustained, we prefer free seats to pews. But for free-seat churches, we believe in ushers, and not in people coming in at random, sitting in little thickets about the church when the house is not full, or wandering about looking for a seat when it is quite full.

It is not necessarily, though it sometimes is, a godless way of distinguishing the rich and poor in God's house. *The auction system we look upon as evil.* We have seen a worthy man, who had met with temporary misfortune, and whose wife and children loved their church and seat, when he had strained every nerve to bid \$1 premium, ostentatiously outbidden by one who had suddenly got rich; and we have seen the crushed and broken spirit of the whole family, and said, in-

wardly and outwardly, "These things ought not so to be." But where pew rents are moderate, it is not necessarily a godless distinction. The curse of God does not light on all that rent pews. There have been many great revivals in churches where the seats were not free. Some of the very greatest revivals known have been in churches where the pews were rented. But this will we say, that we have never known a great revival to occur in a church where the pews were rented and the spirit of the people was such that they would rather sit in state in their own pew with two or three empty seats than to have the church filled with decent people, rich, medium, or poor.

In large cities most churches should be free. Methodism has won its greatest triumphs and drawn its greatest congregations under free seats. It requires great wisdom to manage pews so as not to repel the people. Free seats also have many incidental evils. We have seen pew churches that we thought would have been improved by being turned into free seats, and free-seat churches that were cured of parsimony and discord by having the pews rented. \* \* \* Do you say, "You are writing on both sides of this question?" You have hit the point. We are on both sides. In some places we are for pews; in others, for free seats. Where the work can be better done in one way than another, we prefer that way.

But we do not think that an increase of pew churches promises as much for Methodism as an increase of an equal number of free-seat churches of equal membership.

## V.

## THE WORD OF GOD AT PUBLIC VENDUE—A STINGING CRITICISM ON THE AUCTION SYSTEM.

*The following letter from an unknown correspondent of the Brooklyn EAGLE, although relating to a local discussion, has yet so many points of general interest that we insert it almost entire. The italics are ours.*

ONE of your readers, at least, was surprised at your approval of the premium plan in auctioning off pews to-day. Irrespective of the difference it bears to the former views of the *Eagle* on the same subject, it places you on one side of the question and the majority of the Christian people on the other. You speak of it as the only fair plan of distributing a certain number of seats among a much greater number of people, all of whom have an equal right in the premises. Such a sweeping and exclusive eulogy transcended all the necessary limits of compliment. If it is a plan that makes anything else than worldly prosperity, the measure of a man's right or opportunity advantageously to hear the gospel, I would like to know what it is. That a man who can contribute more in gross than another (each contributing in the same proportion to his means) has, therefore, a better right to hear preaching to a better advantage than that other, is a proposition

which rates churches, theatres, and musical academies on the same pecuniary basis. If the basis be sound, that is no objection. It is not the sound one for churches, because churches are morally entitled to tax sittings only on the hypothesis (and to the extent) that it will render them self-supporting; whereas theatres and the like are intended to make money over and above the expenses. Where the premium plan prevails, the rental fixed on is always up to the figures of actual expenses, and the premium is safely relied upon as an appeal to personal vanity that finds its highest expression in the sensational bids of Christians against one another. I believe the plan is indefensible in equity and morals. I know it to be demoralizing in effect. Moreover it does violence to the feelings of such Christians as do not like the dollar to be the standard of preferment of the man by the church. It makes aristocratic in the bad sense the one institution that should be always purely democratic. "The highest-priced pews hold those to whom pastors and other officers pay the most attention socially and religiously, to whose weaknesses and crimes they are the most lenient, and the occupants of such seats speedily form into rings that either run or divide the church." These are facts, and are not capable of denial as being facts, or of refutation by any logical look at the tendencies of the system in itself. The system of rental—leaving the premium abomination out altogether—is one to which churches give a reluctant assent—simply because for a long time it

seemed the only one that would render churches surely self-supporting. *All churchmen everywhere have felt that the gospel should be free, if it were possible to make it so.* Declarations to that effect have been repeatedly made by the official Courts of Catholicism, Episcopacy, Methodism, Presbyterianism, and others. Whether the premium plan is the only just one or not, may be left to facts. Two churches in the United States alone adopt it, that I am aware of. The rest of the 200,000 odd either have free seats or rent them at a fixed rate. It is depressing that the 199,999 have got at the wrong tack. In at least 10,000 of them, too, the certain number of pews have to be divided among a greater number of people, and it is done by holding continuous services on Sunday, on which different people attend at different times. You may be aware of it, but this premium business results in speculation, in certain ones bidding-in pews and holding them for a rise, and in many families absolutely stinting themselves of necessities at home, in order to keep up the appearance of affluence in church. I know cases in proof of every one of these statements. If this be not the fault of the system, it is the fault of the effect it produces on poor human nature. *A system which grades people according to circumstances, and discriminates in favor of the rich, is no part of the religion of Him who was no respecter of persons.* I am no demagogue. I believe the rich need the gospel as much and more than the poor; their temptations are greater. But it only requires

this premium plan to be carried out to its utmost possibilities, to make poverty incompatible with church privileges altogether. . . .

*Churches should be free or should disband.* Where enough people cannot be got together who will agree voluntarily to support the Gospel, excuse for preaching it does not exist. For one man to know how much another contributes to the Gospel—a contract between man and his Maker as it were—is wrong. For a concern calling itself a Gospel Church to say to any man, ‘Unless you pay so much or so much you shall not hear,’ is simply monstrous. For appeals by sermon or circular, to be made to people to cultivate the grace of giving, and to give all their consciences and resources assure them they can, leaving the amount known only to the donor and his God, is right, and where unselfishly and earnestly done it will succeed. Those who complain that the free plan simply results in a few well-to-do making up big deficiencies at the end of each quarter, will find the explanation in the poor quality of the pastor’s preaching, or in the frivolous, inconsistent tenor of his life. Even the rental churches find their instalments to foreign and home missions, to educational, poor and incidental funds amply met by voluntary contributions. Their running expenses can be met in the same way, if the man in the pulpit be not a blockhead or a charlatan. All needed is the courage to try. Trial fairly made, the systems that inevitably discriminate against the poor and in favor of the rich will appear sacrilegious.

A Protestant, I am free to admit that our Catholic brethren are in the right in this matter and we altogether in the wrong. They have no religious poor-houses named mission chapels, to which the poor are hustled off, but in their churches the rich and poor meet together to worship the Lord, who is Maker of them all.

Doubtless, by the course I advocate, churches would not take in so much money. But that would be a good, not an evil, and instead thereof they would call out more hearers, getting the many who do not come because their poverty is discriminated against, and the many more who stay away because of disgust at the prostitution of the powers of the pulpit to the purpose of squeezing as much money out of pewholders as can be obtained. Excuse the length to which the question in its entire bearings has led, and allow me to differ from you in the same spirit of courtesy that makes all your correspondents your friends.

Very truly yours,

A BROOKLYNITE.

## VI.

## PEW RENTS.

*The following letter from a gentleman well known in Toronto may be taken as an indication of the views many conscientious laymen hold concerning Pew Rents.*

TORONTO, February 13, 1884.

B. F. AUSTIN, B.D.,  
*Principal Alma College:*

DEAR SIR,—A few weeks ago I noticed an article in the *News* of this city, which was prompted by a circular from you to the leading clergymen and editors; and although I cannot be classed under either of these heads, I desire to state a few facts, of which you can make such use as you may deem proper. Allow me first to say, that with the *News'* article I am in full accord, and shall be glad to know that it is to receive a more permanent place in the literary products of our country than the columns of a newspaper.

I shall not attempt to argue a question which seems to me to be entirely clear to any thoughtful mind, but will simply relate my own experience in connection with the pew-renting system.

Some thirteen years ago I left my native town and came to Toronto to live, and on the recommendation of a friend I took up my residence at a large private

boarding-house, where the majority of the inmates were members of some branch of the Christian Church. On the first Sabbath morning after my arrival I was invited by a member of the Church of my choice to attend service with him, which invitation I gladly accepted. He also stated that there was one vacant sitting in the pew, and asked me if I would take it. I replied that I would, and matters moved on smoothly for some time. Gradually changes took place in the *personnel* of the occupants of the pew, until finally I became the senior lessee, and responsible for the pew rent. I had no difficulty in keeping the surplus sittings rented, as the Church at that time was in a most flourishing condition—sitting-room being at a premium. I was continually reminded, however, by what constantly came under my observation (owing to the favorable position of my pew for the purpose), that *the different grades of society were found as distinctly separated in the church as they are in the outer world.* This caused me a great deal of anxious thought, and finally became a subject of earnest and daily prayer that God would raise up some man who would point out to the people the terrible evil of the pew-renting system. After a few months the question forced itself upon me: How can I expect an answer to my prayer, while I myself patronize and support the system? I thought as well might a man expect an answer to his prayer for the adoption of a total prohibitory liquor law, while he himself never passed a hotel without stepping inside for his glass of whis-

key. There was, I felt, but one course for me, and I took it—I gave up my pew. I became a *total abstainer* from pew-renting. It was *then* that I began to realize the enormity of the evil. And let me here say to those who affirm that there is no evil in connection with the pew system; that it is no hindrance to any to attend divine service: "Just give up your pew for three or six months, and I will guarantee that if you have the slightest regard for veracity, you will never again make such an assertion." During my subsequent attendance at that church I felt terribly uncomfortable, and at times almost regretted that I had taken such a step. But while sitting in *a* pew (no longer *my* pew), and having a feeling somewhat akin to envy towards those who could walk straight to the best sittings in the church, this divine promise was brought forcibly to my mind: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." At that time I had no trouble, either present or prospective; but I was comforted with the thought that I had the Master's approval. A year or two passed by, when I began to see trouble looming up before me. A man to whom I had entrusted a large sum of money to be paid to a third party, appropriated it to his own use. On the advice of friends I placed the matter in Court, only to find out that the man was bankrupt. This was a very serious matter for me, as I had just settled down in life, and found my income barely sufficient to meet my necessary expenditure. One day I thought of the promise, and I laid the whole question before

God, pleading His promise. A few evenings after, on my way home from business, I had a strong inclination to make some purchases, but the thought occurred to me that I must dispense with every seeming luxury in order that I might be able to pay my creditor. On arriving at the store the temptation became stronger, and I yielded. While I was being served I picked up a small book that was laying on the counter, and began running the leaves between my thumb and index finger, when I noticed three or four lines of a page printed in large capitals. Naturally enough, I turned back to see what was the important sentence, when to my delight I found it to be the aforesaid promise. I felt that it was for me, the more especially since I had never before nor have I since, seen a book in the store, although dealing there constantly. On reaching home my wife and I got into conversation about our loss, when she stated that we would never again see a cent of the money. I told her we would get every cent of it. She laughed at the apparent absurdity of my statement; nevertheless, I assured her that it would come out all right. A short time after, a relative of the bankrupt told a friend of mine that my money should be refunded, no matter whoever else lost by the failure; that if the estate did not yield enough, she would pay it out of her own pocket. There was not the slightest acquaintance between the lady and myself, so that no motive of friendship prompted this declaration. A little later, on the case being mentioned to the father of the bankrupt, he said

he would have to try to pay the amount, although he had already lost heavily by his son's failure. To my glad surprise, he entered the office one day and asked me for a statement of my account; and on being informed of the amount, he immediately paid me in cash and notes. On presenting a check at the bank by way of payment of one of the notes, I overheard one of the clerks say to another, "That man," meaning the bankrupt's father, "has had a terrible pulling down of late." Yet he did not even suggest, as he might reasonably have done, that I accept something less than one hundred cents on the dollar. Why was this? Was it not because God had promised to deliver me in the time of trouble? And do not the above facts bear me out in believing that the promise was made specially applicable to my case, in consideration of my having given up my pew rather than support a system which does so much to hinder the progress of God's Kingdom in the earth? And am I not now seeing, in the work you have undertaken, an answer to that part of my prayer that God would raise up some man who would be the means in His hands of opening the eyes of the people to the terrible evils attending the pew-renting system?

What the liquor traffic is to the State, the pew-renting system is to the Church—the greatest present evil; and both are supported and perpetuated because of the revenue derived therefrom, and because they appeal to everything that is base and selfish in man's nature. I have never yet heard one argument ad-

vanced in favor of pew-renting that would not, if weighed in God's balance, be found wanting in everything of a holy or divine character. The thing is either an evil or it is not; and if the former, who will preach the doctrine, "Do evil that good may come?" Nay, rather, let us as congregations pursue our Christian life as halt and maimed, rather than have fine buildings, grand organs, etc., only to have a name to live while we are dead.

LOVER OF A FREE GOSPEL.



## VII.

## TRIALS OF MEN OF LIMITED MEANS IN THE CHURCH.

*The following editorial from the New York CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE has a direct bearing upon the discussions of this volume. It shows clearly one of the great dangers of the Church of to-day, and the duty of adopting a catholic church policy.*

A GREAT deal depends, as is well known, upon the spirit with which strangers are received, when they settle in any locality. A Christian having his certificate of membership appears and presents his credentials. If he be a merchant and in a prosperous business, a banker, a professional man having a large income—in a word, a man of known social position—he is sure to be received with great courtesy. His house will be overrun with callers. The pastor will show him marked attention. The wives of prominent men will call upon his family, and every means will be used to make them feel happy in their new home. But if he be a person of limited means and comparatively unknown, in many cases the pastor may delay to call. But if he performs his duty, few and far between will be the calls which his family will receive from the prominent members of the society. The prosperous man will be brought forward, even if he wish to live a retired life. The man in obscure circumstances must often push himself forward.

It is not the distinction between the rich and the poor that is now under consideration, but the difference between the treatment of the very prosperous and persons of moderate means. Yet some of these may have stood very high, and have been of very great service in the churches whence they came, and the contrast between the chilling reception given them and the warm manifestation of affection which they received on leaving is hard to endure.

The money question, of course, is very important to churches in debt, to churches having a small congregation and large expenses, to churches which aspire to a higher social position than their resources as congregations can sustain without continued and arduous efforts. Where money is necessary it must be sought, but this necessity can never justify public manifestations of greater cordiality to one class of strangers than to another. In such a church the pastor should be rather the more anxious to show attention to the man of limited means, and the leading members should be zealous in endeavoring to make those persons feel that they are none the less welcome because they are not able to hire the most expensive pew, or to rival those who make the largest subscriptions.

St. James uttered some stern words concerning having respect of persons, and declared that those who did so, especially with regard to new-comers, commit sin and are convinced of the law as transgressors. Even in the worldly point of view, upon the lowest plane of practical prudence, such conduct is unwise, for a man of limited means may, by his zeal and

enthusiasm and joyful contribution of all that he possesses, do more for the church by attracting others, and even by the amount of his gifts, than many possessed of more means but in an indifferent state.

It is to be feared that in some of our churches only the very rich and the very poor are sure of a cordial reception. It is also to be feared that many of the very best men and women in country and village churches, or in the less wealthy parts of cities, removing from the country to the city and from one part of the city to another, are alienated, grow cold, become inactive, or even backslidden, because they see that when they arrive they are weighed in the balances, and if found wanting in worldly possessions are allowed, unless possessing peculiar personal attractions and much energy, to sink out of notice.

We raise a note of warning in the hope that, where needed, it will do good. Certainly, where not needed it can do no harm. It was said by a Christian of more than sixty years' observation, that "good men of limited means need double grace to stay in the Church." Conceding that they are often exposed to strong temptation, and having in their behalf endeavoured to protest against the evils under which they suffer, we urge them to consider that whatever grace they may require is accessible, and that of all things the most perilous and unwise for them and for their families is that they should stand back and neglect their duty because others "do not fulfil the law of Christ."

## VII.

## POVERTY AND PEW RENTS.

HERE is an item for the commonplace books of "free and open church" advocates:—*Parson*: "O, Smith, I don't see you and your family at church now. What's the reason?" *Smith*: "Well, to tell you the truth, sir, times is bad, and my wages low for more'n a year. So we can't afford to pay pew rents, and the wife she couldn't bear to sit in them free seats 'cause it would sort o' advertise our poverty, so we just stays away." This authentic incident affords a little argument for free and open churches. We need a strong mission in Canada against pews. The citadel is weak, for the majority of churches have free seats; let us then attack the fort all along the line. The cause commends itself to common sense, true instincts of religion, and the glorious freedom of the Gospel. Churchmen, fight for it, and the victory is yours!—*Church Guardian*.



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